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**FRIENDS
OF ACPL**

BLACKBEARD'S
ISLAND



THEY PROVE THAT SOMEBODY DID ACTUALLY HIDE MONEY ON THAT ISLAND
WAY BACK BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

BLACKBEARD'S ISLAND

THE ADVENTURES OF
THREE BOY SCOUTS
IN THE SEA ISLANDS

BY
RUPERT SARGENT HOLLAND

AUTHOR OF "THE BOY SCOUTS OF BIRCH-BARK ISLAND,"
"THE BOY SCOUTS OF SNOW-SHOE LODGE," ETC.

FRONTISPIECE BY
WILL THOMSON



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BLACKBEARD'S ISLAND

I

THE OLD BOX

TOM and Rodney Mason, who lived in New York City, had gone south to visit their cousin, Stephen Sims, who lived in Charleston, South Carolina. They reached the old southern city by the sea early in September. All three boys belonged to troops of Boy Scouts, and the two boys from the north soon found that Stephen and his troop were not very different from themselves, except that the Southerners spoke with a slow, soft drawl that somehow resembled the way the darkies talked, and yet was not really like it.

The house in which Stephen lived was an old one with a small yard in front, and a great deep garden at the back. Splendid magnolia trees reached up above the second floor, and shaded a porch on which Stephen sometimes slept. The garden was filled with flowers of all kinds, but asters and dahlias were more abundant than any others. The two boys from New York quickly grew very fond of the beautiful southern city. They liked to tramp through the country where the pinkish-gray moss hung in

deep festoons from the live-oaks, they liked to row or sail on the harbor, to visit Fort Moultrie, and to listen to the stories the old darkies told about B'rer Rabbit and his friends.

The three were coming home from a tramp one afternoon when Rodney stopped and pointed to a little cottage just on the edge of the town. It was painted white, and vines had grown over it so that it was hard to see the windows. On the small porch in front an elderly woman sat in a rocking-chair, knitting.

"What a dandy little house!" said Rodney. "It doesn't look very much bigger than some of those toy-houses you see in store-windows."

"And the little lady just fits the porch," added Tom. "She might be a doll herself."

Stephen grinned. "You mustn't make fun of her," he said. "That's Mrs. Pinckney. She's lived there ever since I can remember, and everybody's very fond of her. There isn't anything about Charleston that she doesn't know."

The path of the boys took them near the cottage, and, as they went by, the old lady beckoned to Stephen.

"Come in with me a minute," he said to the other two, and went up the path to the porch.

"I wanted to give you a message for your mother," said Mrs. Pinckney. "Will you tell her I had a letter from my cousin John in London, and

that he says he is going to marry an English lady? Perhaps your mother will come over to tea some day and let me read her the letter."

"I'll tell her, Mrs. Pinckney," said Stephen. "These are my New York cousins," and he introduced Tom, who was a slender, sandy-haired boy of sixteen, and Rodney, a year younger, darker, and stockier in build. "I've just been telling them that you know everything about the history of Charleston, Mrs. Pinckney," he added.

The lady's gray eyes twinkled. "That's a good deal for any one person to know," she said, "but I sometimes think I could tell enough stories about this old city to make quite a number of books."

"Did you know that old pirate, named Blackbeard?" asked Stephen. "I heard father speak of him the other day."

Mrs. Pinckney laughed. "Why goodness gracious! The pirate Blackbeard lived 'way back before the Revolution!" she exclaimed. "That was in my great-great-great-grandmother's day, and I'm sure she didn't see very much of him!"

"Tell us about him," begged Tom, who had always had a strong regard for pirates.

"There isn't much to tell," said Mrs. Pinckney. "He took some money from my great-great-great-grandfather, and all the family have had a grudge against him ever since. The pirate's real name was Captain Edward Teach, but he was always called

Blackbeard. He used to sail up and down the coast, and prey upon the ships that sailed from the southern cities to England. In some way he would find out when people in Charleston were taking gold across the sea, and then he would hold up their ship and make them hand over the guineas to him. My great-great-great-grandfather, Samuel Pinckney, sailed with a box of money in 1718, five hundred guineas I have been told he had, and Blackbeard caught the ship, and took away all their money from the passengers. Five hundred guineas were quite a fortune in those days." She looked at some breaks in the little picket fence that marked the edge of her lawn, at her tiny garden, and then at her vine-covered porch. "There are many things I might do to this house of mine if only I had those five hundred guineas now."

"What became of the pirate?" asked Rodney.

"Oh, he was caught in time; but great-great-great-grandfather never got the money back. There used to be a story that Blackbeard hid his treasure somewhere along the coast; but he might as well have thrown it overboard so far as anyone has ever been able to find it."

"Think of that!" exclaimed Tom, his eyes looking at the old lady as if she were a figure in a fairy tale. "Think of there having been a real pirate near here! We don't have anything nearly as exciting as that up in New York."

Again Mrs. Pinckney's eyes gleamed with amusement. "Oh, we have many exciting stories of Charleston," she said, "but you must not get me started talking about them, or you will never get home to supper. If you will bring your friends over early some afternoon, I'll spin some fine yarns for them, Stephen." The boys thanked her for the invitation, and went back to the road.

Tom began to question Stephen about the pirate, but Stephen had to admit that he knew nothing more about him than Mrs. Pinckney had already told them. Mr. Sims was away from home at the time, and Mrs. Sims knew nothing about Blackbeard, so that Tom's curiosity had to remain unsatisfied.

Stephen's troop of scouts had made the two boys from the North welcome, and had taken them on some of their hikes into the country. Of course the Charleston boys knew their own city well, but the two New Yorkers found something every day that was new and interesting. Stephen was good-natured, and went about the streets of the old town with his two cousins on many an exploration. He found also that the two strangers often pointed out things to him that he had never noticed before, although he had lived there all his life.

One day the three boys were prowling around the old business part of the city when Tom spied an old curiosity shop that was wedged in between two much larger stores. In the window were sheets of

foreign postage stamps, trays of old coins and medals, several rusty fire-arms and swords, some battered andirons, and a jumble of other things.

"Let's have a look inside," Tom suggested, and pushed open the front door, which rang a little bell.

A man in a black skull-cap came out from a back room. His shoulders were bent, and he was very near-sighted, so that he looked like a big bird continually peering about for something.

"What can I show you?" he asked.

"Oh, we just wanted to look around," said Stephen. He added jokingly, "These two fellows belong to a Silver Fox Scout-patrol. I don't suppose you've got anything with a fox stamped on it."

"Fox," said the shopkeeper, "no, I don't think I have. I have eagles and lions and alligators, but I don't think there's a fox's head in the place."

Tom meanwhile was looking at the curiosities that hung on the wall and filled a set of shelves at one side of the shop. The things were all dusty and dingy, and looked as if they might have been there for a great many years. Stephen examined sheets of postage stamps, which he was collecting, and Rodney fingered an old duelling-pistol that had an elaborate design chased on its silver mounting.

As Tom went slowly around the room, he came upon an old chest in one corner. "That looks like our wood-box at home," he said.

The shopkeeper gave a snort. "You never saw

any wood-box like that," he said. "That's made of mahogany, and was built to hold the finest linens. Open the lid and see the smooth satiny finish."

Tom lifted the lid, and saw that the chest was as beautiful as the man had described it. Inside was a smaller chest with a top of hammered brass, showing a coat-of-arms.

"That looks mighty fine," he said. "I wish I could take a box like that back to the Troop. We want something to keep our books and papers in, but that one is too big, I'm afraid."

He lifted the lid of this second chest, and was surprised to see a third and much smaller one inside. "Why, it's a regular nest of boxes!" he exclaimed, and lifted the smallest one out. This was made of leather, with heavy iron bands and hinges. There was a lock on the front side, but no key.

"Now there's a real old box," said the shop-keeper, peering closely at it. "It has no key, but you could have one fitted to it. I shouldn't wonder if that there box was a couple of hundred years old."

The box was about a foot long by eight inches across, and five or six inches deep, and an iron handle stretched from two of the bands on the top. Tom opened the lid, and saw that the inside was made of neatly joined pieces of cedar. The cedar, the leather, and the iron were all mouldy and mildewed.

"How much is it?" Tom asked.

The shopkeeper took the box and rubbed his thumb along the leather cover. "It's good and strong," he said. "They made things to last in those days. That ought to be worth five dollars."

Rodney, hearing the talk, came over and looked at Tom's find. "Five dollars for that old thing! Why, it hasn't any key! What would you do with it, Tom?"

"I think the Troop might like it for their papers," Tom answered. "It's ever so much better than a brand new box would be."

"I wouldn't want to pay more than two dollars for it," declared the practical Rodney.

The shopkeeper saw that the elder boy really wanted the box. "Well," he said, "it's worth five dollars at least; but I'll let you have it for four."

"Make it three," chimed in Stephen, who was looking over Tom's shoulder.

"I'll give you three-fifty," said Tom.

The shopkeeper sighed. "I oughtn't to let it go for that," he protested; "it's a real antique, and I know there's many a collector who would be glad to lay his hands on it."

"Three-fifty," repeated Tom, feeling that the other was yielding.

"All right," said the man, and pulled some paper out from behind the counter to wrap up the purchase.

Tom paid over the money, and took his prize.

"We'd better get out right away," laughed

Rodney, "or Tom will be buying some more useless truck. Think what you and I could do with that money, Stephen," he added, prodding his cousin in the ribs.

Tom, however, was not to be laughed out of his satisfaction. Pleased with his purchase, he carried it to his uncle's house and put it on the table in his room.

That evening, as Mrs. Sims and the three boys sat on the broad porch at the rear of the house, it occurred to Tom to show his purchase to his aunt. He brought the box out, unwrapped it, and placed it in her lap.

"I'm going to give that to our Troop," he said. "It's a real strong-box, and you don't find things as well made as that every day."

"I reckon you're a real antiquarian, Tom," said his aunt, smiling at the serious look on his face. "You like a thing a heap better because it is old, don't you? Well, this certainly looks as if it might have been through the wars." To please the boy, she examined his purchase and admired it, before she gave it back to him.

Rodney and Stephen were playing with a Scotch terrier at the edge of the porch, and Tom stretched out in a wicker chair, his box in his hands. He rubbed the old leather cover, he raised the lid, he thumped the cedar lining, and then he took out his pocket-knife, and began to probe at the bottom.

Mrs. Sims and the boys chatted and watched the dog. Tom worked away with his knife. Presently he gave an exclamation and sat upright; his knife had caught in the edge of the cedar lining at the bottom of the box and pried it out. Underneath was a tiny compartment with a folded piece of parchment lying in it.

Very much excited, Tom picked up the parchment and unfolded it. It seemed to be a drawing of an oblong piece of land. There were various mysterious crosses, dots and arrows on it. Beside some of the crosses there was writing; the lines made by the arrows all met at a point marked by a red circle. The light was too dim to read much of the writing, but in the lower right-hand corner there stood out in large letters the words, "Map of Teach's Island."

"Map of Teach's Island!" cried Tom. "Teach's Island! Why that was the name of Mrs. Pinckney's pirate!"

Stephen and Rodney bent over the parchment, staring at it in amazement. Mrs. Sims got up from her chair and leaned over Tom's shoulder. "Teach's Island," she said, "I don't think I ever heard of that."

"Wasn't Teach the real name of the man they used to call Blackbeard?" asked Tom.

"I don't know," said his aunt.

"I think it was," said Tom, in a tone of voice

that showed how much he was impressed by his discovery. "I think this must be one of the islands the pirate used for a harbor in the old days, and he had some reason for making all these marks on it."

"By George!" exclaimed Stephen. "Maybe you are right, Tom—and if you are, that box must have belonged to Blackbeard himself!"

Rodney, usually the skeptical one, was staring at his brother's treasure with wide-open eyes. "Do you suppose," he said, "there is such an island somewhere near Charleston? And if there is, do you suppose we could find it?"

"And if we found it," added Tom, "what do you suppose we would find at this place marked with the red circle?"

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Stephen. "Things like that don't happen nowadays."

"Well," declared Tom, "that man in the shop didn't know the box had a false bottom, and yet it had, and I found it, so there's no telling what we might find if we hunted for that island. I want to have a try at it anyway."

"Let's take it in to the lamp and get a magnifying-glass," suggested Mrs. Sims.

Tom took the box and the parchment into the sitting-room, and spread the map out on the table. Then the boys began to study it through Mr. Sims' lens. The more they worked over the mysterious marks and signs, the more excited they grew.

ON THE TRAIL OF PIRATE TEACH

THE sun had only been up a very little time the next morning when Rodney, rising on one elbow, looked over at his brother, who was sleeping in a bed near his own. As if Rodney's glance had hypnotized him, Tom opened his eyes. "I bet I know what you were dreaming about," whispered Rodney.

Tom grinned. "I wasn't dreaming of anything, Sherlock Holmes," he retorted.

"Well, I was, anyhow," said Rodney, sitting up and running his fingers through his shock of dark hair as if to waken himself more thoroughly. "I was dreaming of that old scout, Blackbeard, and the box you found. I was just about to finish the pirate chief with a blow of my trusty sword, as we were fighting a duel on the beach, when a rooster crowed and woke me up. It's awfully exciting, isn't it? I think we ought to get up at once and see what's to be done."

Rodney was a positive, down-right fellow, while Tom was much more apt to think matters out carefully before he ventured on them. He lay looking at the ceiling until Rodney could stand it no longer.

"Why don't you say something?" the younger brother demanded. "A fellow might think you

were in the habit of finding maps of treasure-islands every day."

Tom turned his eyes, which he could make look almost as large and solemn as those of an owl when he wanted, and fixed them on his brother. "How do we know that box wasn't just a joke that man in the shop was trying to play on somebody? I dare say getting people to hunt for Blackbeard's Island is a regular April Fool joke down here."

"The man in the shop didn't look much like a joker," said Rodney. "He looked more like a clergyman to me. I don't believe he had any idea what was hidden in that old box. Let's see what Steve has to say about it."

The boys slipped out of their beds and tiptoed into the next room. The bright sunlight or an early rooster had awakened Stephen, too, and he was looking at the ceiling, absorbed in thought.

"Hello!" he exclaimed as his two cousins came in. "I bet I know what got you up so early! That precious old island!"

"Tom thinks that Blackbeard's Island is a regular April Fool joke down here in Charleston," said Rodney. "What do you say about it?"

"Well, I know pretty nearly all the April Fool jokes there are," answered Stephen, "and I never heard of this one before. To tell you the truth——" He sat up, and after looking mysteriously about the room, as though he thought there might be some one

listening, said in a dramatic whisper, "I believe there's something in it!"

"Seems as if there might be," said Rodney.

Both boys looked at Tom, and it was plain they thought his opinion of decided importance.

Tom looked out the window at the boughs of the magnolia, looked up at the ceiling, balanced backward and forward on his toes, and then said impressively, "Well, I think it's a good sporting chance that there may be something in it."

It took the three a very short time to dress. Once dressed, they took the precious box, which had stood on the table near Tom's bed, down-stairs to the porch. The old map was still in its secret pocket in the box, and the drawings on it had not been changed over night. Laying it flat on the porch, the boys pored over it again. The more they studied it, the more they seemed to understand the drawing. The outline showed an island about three times as long as it was wide. An arrow in the corner of the parchment indicated that the length of the island ran almost north and south. Near the southwest corner two parallel black lines ran into the interior, and the letter R led the boys to suppose that these black lines indicated a tidal river. To the east of the river's mouth were a lot of black marks that the boys could not decipher. The river—if river it was—ran north, and at about one-third the length of the island there was a cross, and from this a path

seemed to leave the river and zigzag in a northeast direction to a point not very far from the eastern shore. This point was marked with a circle, and from it two small parallel lines led to the east coast. Very close to this circle was a cross marked in red, which seemed to the boys to indicate that this was the point of chief importance to the maker of the drawing. For half an hour the boys, studied this mysterious document. Then Jacob, the colored servant, announcing that Mrs. Sims was waiting for them at breakfast, they hurried in. As they took their places at table Stephen's mother told them that she, too, had been thinking about Tom's purchase.

Breakfast finished, they held a council of war. There was nothing more to be learned from the map at present, so Tom entrusted it to his aunt, who said that she would lock the box in a small safe in her room. The next question was as to what use the three were to make of their discovery.

"Do you think we'd better tell the other boys in the troop about it?" Stephen asked. "Maybe they could give us some good ideas."

"We've got ideas enough," said Tom. "What we want is to pick out the most important ones. Suppose we tell them about it, and ask them to keep it secret; some of them might, but one or two would almost surely give the thing away. Then we'd have the town hunting for the island, and that would spoil the whole thing."

"Well, here come two of the troop now," said Stephen. "Suppose you sound them out, Tom, and see what you think about them."

Up the path came a couple of boys in scout suits, Jack Potter and George Collins. For a few minutes they all talked about a hike the troop was planning for the next Saturday; then Tom abruptly said, "Did you fellows ever hear of a man called Blackbeard?"

"Bluebeard, you mean," said George. "The one who wouldn't let his wife look into the closet."

"No, I don't," said Tom. "I mean Blackbeard, a pirate who used to hold up ships sailing out of Charleston."

Jack shook his head. "Never heard of him," said he. "I don't believe there ever was such a fellow. They're all just old fairy tales, Blackbeards and Bluebeards, and the rest of them."

"Did you ever hear of him?" asked George. "Is that a story they tell up in New York about us down here?"

"No," said Tom; "but I think if there had been a pirate here it would be good fun to see what we could find out about him."

"Excuse me!" said George. "I'd rather go on a hike through the woods any day than hunt all the old pirates people yarn about."

"That's just it," agreed Jack. "People always talk about pirates, but they don't ever show us any."

"Well, we could"—began Stephen, when a quick look from Tom stopped him. "We could go on a hike almost any time," he added, rather lamely.

Plans were made for the troop's next hike, and then Jack and George went on to hunt up others of the troop. Tom shook his head. "No, I don't think we'd better tell them anything about it," he declared; "they'd always be thinking up objections, and we don't want that sort of people in our party. Don't believe in pirates! Why, you might as well say you don't believe in Indians!"

"They have seen Indians, but they've never seen a pirate," said Stephen, trying to stand up for the two boys of his troop.

"Well, there are a lot of things you haven't seen that you believe in," said Tom. "For instance, I've never seen a king, but I know there are kings over in Europe."

That seemed to settle the argument, and without more discussion it was decided that the secret should not be shared with the rest of Stephen's troop.

The middle of that morning, Mrs. Pinckney, arranging some flowers in her sitting-room, was surprised to find three young visitors knocking at her door. There was an air of mystery about them that made her smile as she asked them to come in and be seated.

Tom was the spokesman. "We would like to know something more about that fellow Blackbeard,"

he said, sitting on the edge of his chair and looking very solemnly at the rosy-cheeked old lady.

"Ah," she said, "I thought you would like the old fellow; but I'm afraid I have told you all I know about him."

"When was the time he stole your great-great-great-grandfather's money from his ship?" asked Tom, as if he were a lawyer questioning a witness.

"It was in 1718," Mrs. Pinckney answered.

"And have you any idea where he hid his booty?" was Tom's next question.

"Dear me, no!" she answered; "if I had I'd have gone to hunt for it long ago."

"Well, what did people use to say about his hiding-place?" Tom went on.

Mrs. Pinckney laughed. "You know how it is with such stories," she said. "People like to make a good yarn about a pirate. They said he hid his treasures on a number of small islands lying south of here. Some of the Sea Islands off Beaufort, I suppose they meant."

"And you never heard anything more definite than that?" Tom next asked.

"No, I never did. You see it all happened nearly two hundred years ago."

That was all they could learn from Mrs. Pinckney, and the three boys next went to the old curiosity shop where Tom had bought the box. They had carefully prepared a plan so as not to arouse the

shopkeeper's curiosity too much. Stephen again looked over some foreign postage stamps and at last bought a few for his collection, and, in the meantime, Tom, in a very off-hand way, told the little man in the skull-cap how much pleased he was with the box he had purchased. "I think it must be very old," he said. "I suppose from the look of it it might have been made two hundred years ago, perhaps."

The shopkeeper squinted, as though he were trying to recall the box he had sold. "Well, I shouldn't wonder if it might have been," he agreed. "They used to make things to last in the old days."

Stephen went on looking at stamps; and presently Tom said, "Remember where you got that box?"

Again the shopkeeper squinted. "Let me see. Seems to me it came with a lot of goods I bought from an old warehouse down at the harbor, an old exporting house it was, that used to do quite a trade with the West Indies, but was going out of business and sold off the old chests and trunks and such like. That sort of a house collects a lot of old curiosities in the course of trade. I dare say they'd sent goods back and forth between here and Havana in that box many a time."

Stephen chose a row of stamps he wanted, and the shopkeeper picked them off from the page and put them in a little envelope.

"You never heard anyone say anything more

about that particular box, did you?" asked Tom. "Nobody ever came in wanting one just like it, I suppose?"

The man shook his head. "No, no; people don't use that sort of box nowadays, and I don't think anybody ever asked for the price on it till you came in yesterday."

All this time Tom had been watching the man closely, and he was now convinced that the latter had not intended to play any joke on the box's purchaser nor had any particular interest in its history. So far as the shopkeeper was concerned, the box was evidently simply one of a lot bought from the trading-house.

"Well, I guess that's all," said Tom; and Stephen, taking the hint that his cousin had learned all there was to learn, paid for his stamps and the three went out of the shop.

They had dinner, and then a brilliant idea occurred to Stephen. "My uncle's a lawyer and he knows most everything. Suppose we go down to his office and have a talk with him. We needn't tell him what we've found, unless it's absolutely necessary. If we do have to tell him, I'm sure he can keep a secret as well as mother can."

It was clear that they would have to have the advice of some one else if they were to make much further progress in their search, and so Tom and Rodney at once agreed to Stephen's suggestion.

Mr. Samuel Sims' office was in an old building down on Broad Street, and after waiting a few minutes in his outer office the boys were shown into his private room. Rows of old green boxes with labels stood on shelves all about the room. A large safe in one corner gave an air of great responsibility to the place. The windows, giving on to a small yard at the back of the building, looked as if they had not been washed since the last rain. In spite of these musty surroundings, Stephen's Uncle Samuel was an alert, very pleasant-looking person, and he shook hands with all three boys as though he would rather have seen them than any other callers.

"And what can I do for you, gentlemen?" he said, as he waved them to chairs. "Would you like me to draw you a mortgage, or had you thought of making your wills to-day?"

"You'll probably think we're crazy, Uncle Sam," said Stephen. "We want to ask you a lot of ridiculous questions, and if you don't mind we would rather not tell you the reason just now."

"Very good," said Mr. Sims. "I'm used to being asked a lot of ridiculous questions, and very often people fail to tell me why they asked them. Fire away! What's first?"

"You ask questions best, Tom," suggested Stephen.

So Tom, pulling a lock of his sandy hair, as he did when very much in earnest, took the floor.

"We're very much interested in a story we've run across about an old pirate named Teach, or Blackbeard, who used to take money from ships sailing out of Charleston about 1718. Do you know about him?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," answered Mr. Sims, as if he had all the information about the pirate at his fingertips. "There are a number of people in Charleston whose ancestors suffered at Teach's hands. He seems to have been an extraordinary person. One of the stories about him is that he captured a ship from here with a prominent merchant named Samuel Wragg and some others on board, and then as some of his crew were sick he sent a boat to the city with a message to the governor that he would cut off the heads of Mr. Wragg and the others and have them sent to the governor unless the governor supplied him with the medicines he needed. The governor was furious, but the families of the prisoners insisted that he should send the medicines; so the medicines were sent back in a small boat. Then Teach took all the money from his prisoners. Some people say he got as much as six thousand dollars in specie from Mr. Wragg alone, and he set the prisoners on shore some distance from the city. Afterwards the governor and the council fitted out ships to fight the pirates. They got some of them and hung them, but they never laid their hands on Mr. Blackbeard."

"There's no doubt that there was such a man, then?" Tom demanded.

"No doubt whatever," said Mr. Sims. "I think he was finally captured by an expedition sent from Virginia, but I'm not sure of that."

"And do the stories say what he did with all the money he took from these people, from Mr. Wragg and the others?"

The lawyer smiled and rubbed the tips of his fingers together.

"The stories say that he used to hide the money on islands along the coast, but that's what stories of pirates always say. I won't vouch for that yarn; but as he couldn't very well have put the money in the bank, I suppose it's as likely he hid it somewhere as that he did anything else with it."

Tom looked at the long rows of filing-boxes while he thought what question he should next ask. "Mrs. Pinckney told us she thought the pirate might have hidden his money on the islands off Beaufort, the Sea Islands, she called them."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Sims, "that's what many people used to think. There are a lot of small sandy islands, with wide marshes, live-oaks, and palmettoes, off Beaufort. The darkies grow cotton on the biggest of them, and one or two are owned by a man who uses them for hunting. Some of the smaller ones, farthest out from the coast, are as deserted as in Blackbeard's day."

"Well, do you think he might have used one of those islands?" Tom continued.

The lawyer nodded his head. "If I had been in his boots I think they are just the sort of place I would have picked out. There aren't any places nearer here that would have served as well."

That was encouraging news. Stephen nodded to Rodney. "It isn't very far to Beaufort, is it, Uncle Sam?" he asked.

"Oh, no. It wouldn't take you long if the trains weren't so slow. You have to change cars at Yemassee. It's a quaint old town, and I think you boys might enjoy running down there to see it. Before the war, many Charleston people had their summer homes at Beaufort. Why don't you ask your mother to let you go down there, and have a look at the old town, Stephen?"

"I think I will," said Stephen, more and more pleased as his uncle seemed to wish to further their plans.

"I guess that's all now," said Tom. "Thank you ever so much for what you've told us."

Mr. Sims looked inquiringly at each of the three boys. "I suppose you've come upon some clue that you're thinking of following up. Well, I'm not going to ask you any questions about it; but I wish you luck. If I can help you in any way, be sure and let me know. I can keep a secret pretty well. In fact, that's a large part of a lawyer's business. I

don't want to know any more now, but if you do find old Teach's treasure, I hope you'll give me one of the gold-pieces to wear on my watch-chain as a souvenir."

Tom laughed. "We certainly will," he said.

Once outside the lawyer's office, the boys looked at each other in great excitement.

"Well, the trail certainly leads to Beaufort!" exclaimed Tom.

"And those Sea Islands where they grow cotton!" added Rodney.

"Jumping Jupiter!" exclaimed Stephen. "Suppose we should find that one of those islands looks like the drawing on the map!"

That evening Mr. Sims returned home, and after supper the three boys sat round him in the sitting-room and told him all they had learned in regard to the map and the island it might represent. Mr. Sims examined the drawing carefully when he had heard their story.

"If this were a business proposition," he said finally, "I should say it was about as fishy a story as could be found. People have hunted for Captain Kidd's treasure up and down the coast, and I dare say for the hidden treasure of every other pirate that ever sailed the sea, and I don't recollect ever having heard that they found any of the treasure."

He looked at the boys, and thought the eagerness in their faces gave place to disappointment.

"However, there are some very curious facts in all this business. There certainly was a pirate named Teach, or Blackbeard, and he certainly stole money from ships leaving Charleston. Then I can't see why anyone should have wanted to play a joke by hiding this map in the bottom of the box, and from what you tell me the shopkeeper had no suspicion of it's being there. It may be two hundred years old. The box and the map certainly look as if they might be, and there may be an island that corresponds to this drawing. As for the island's being one of those off Beaufort—well, I don't know—it might be or it mightn't. Anyway, I don't see why you three boys shouldn't go and see what you can find."

All three shouted with delight.

"That's bully, dad!" cried Stephen, dancing round his father and waving his arms like a wind-mill.

"We'll find the island, if it's there to be found, Uncle Dick," Tom solemnly assured Mr. Sims.

"You bet we will," said Rodney. "And it will be great practice for us as scouts anyway."

"I'd like to go with you," said Mr. Sims, "but I can't get away just now." Do you think you three can take care of yourselves? I know Tom's got a long head on his shoulders, but Steve's fond of getting into hot water." He smiled at his merry-faced son, who had stopped dancing and waving his

arms and was resting his hands on his father's shoulders.

"Well, I'll keep them both in order," said Rodney. "I know how to manage Tom, and if Steve gets too gay I'll speak my mind to him."

"Oh, you will, will you?" retorted Stephen. "I've got as good horse-sense as Rodney any day."

"I suppose you'd like to start for Beaufort at once," said Mr. Sims. "I have a friend who lives there, Colonel Whitney. I'll give you a letter of introduction to him, and I'm sure he'll give you any information about the islands you may need. I tell you what! You three are lucky chaps! It isn't all boys who have a chance to hunt for real buried treasure."

The rest of the evening was spent in making their plans for the trip. Each boy had his own outfit of clothes packed in his own travelling bag, and Mr. Sims provided them with all the money he thought would be necessary for the expedition.

When Mrs. Sims spoke to her husband about the boys' trip after the three had gone to bed, her husband reassured her.

"They've all got good judgment, and I know enough of Boy Scouts to know that they won't run into any danger recklessly. It ought to be good experience for them, and I'll send a line to Colonel Whitney, and ask him to keep an eye on them for me. It would be more than human for the boys to resist trying to find the original of that island."

III

TO THE SEA ISLANDS

ON a September morning, the three boys left Charleston by train, bound for the Sea Islands. Tom had made a tracing of the map of Teach's island, and had left the copy in the old box in his room. The original map he put in the pocket of his coat and fastened it in with a pin. He thought it was easily the most valuable thing he had ever owned.

The train wound away eastward from the city, and finally deposited the three boys at the junction of Yemassee. Here they had to wait nearly an hour before a little bob-tailed train, an engine with a combination baggage-and-passenger car, was ready to take them down to the coast. A ride through pines and over a rough road-bed brought them presently to the town of Beaufort, once a fashionable summer-resort for the rich people of Charleston, but now shorn of much of its former glory. A man at the station directed them to Colonel Whitney's house, and the three walked up the main street, which led them along the harbor-front, until they came to a fine old house with a two-storied front porch standing in a big garden. A smiling negro servant told the boys that Colonel Whitney was at home, and in a few minutes they were shaking hands with that gentleman himself. He was very courteous, and his

white moustache and little imperial gave him a most distinguished look. He read the note from Mr. Sims, and then shook hands a second time with the boys.

"You've grown a lot since I saw you last, Stephen," said he. "I reckon boys grow up quicker in Charleston than they do down here in Beaufort. And now what can I do for you?"

The three had decided that Tom, who was a little older than Stephen, should be spokesman for them. They had also decided to say that they were looking for a certain island that had been described to them as a good place to camp out, but to make no mention of what they planned to do when they reached the island. So Tom now described the size and shape of the island on the map, and said that they would like very much to find some way to get to it.

Colonel Whitney listened attentively, and then explained the geography of that part of the coast to them. Two large islands, one called Ladies' Island and one St. Helena Island, lay nearest to Beaufort, and were occupied by a great number of small farms belonging to negroes, the chief crop being cotton. There were also half-a-dozen old plantations, more or less deserted now, and a large school for negroes. Beyond St. Helena Island lay a cluster of small islands. One of these, lying to the east, belonged to a man from New York named Blossom, who used it as a place to hunt. He had a house, a negro superintendent, and plenty of boats at his

dock. He often entertained guests there, and it happened that he was living on his island now. This was the nearest habitation to the small outlying islands the boys sought.

"I can arrange to have you ferried across to Ladies' Island, and have one of the darkies drive you from the landing there across the island and over the bridge to Mr. Blossom's place," said Colonel Whitney. "I'll give you a note for Mr. Blossom, who is a most agreeable man. We won't be able to make these arrangements before to-morrow, and I hope that I may have the pleasure of entertaining you till then."

Of course the boys accepted gladly. They had dinner with the Colonel and his wife, and their host told them a great deal about the old town. Afterwards the boys went on an exploring expedition by themselves. There was a great deal that was interesting, for the town was very old and there were many houses and gardens that had been beautiful in their prime. The water-front had a special fascination for them. From the shore they could see the low sandy islands that stretched away out to sea. Occasional motor-boats chugged up and down, some taking people to the naval station at Port Royal, others bent on harbor work. Darkies sat about in the warm sun; some were napping on the grass beside the road. There was an air of drowsiness about the place that made it hard for the boys to keep awake.

Finding a comfortable bench, the three sat down and, taking out the map, discussed their plans. As they were talking, a man with a red, weather-beaten face, a faded blue suit, and a cap with a shiny leather visor, strolled up to them and leaned against a tree.

"Evening, neighbors," said he in the friendly fashion in which everybody spoke at Beaufort. "Were you planning to do a little hunting hereabouts? You're a little ahead of the season." He grinned as if he had made a joke.

"No," said Stephen, and added, "at least not the kind of hunting you mean."

"Well, there's all kinds of hunting," said the man. "There's oysters, and there's turkeys, and ducks, and 'possum. Now, what kind of hunting might you young gen'lemen be thinking of?"

"We're not going hunting at all," said Rodney. "We're going out to see Mr. Blossom on his island."

"Oh, Mr. Blossom," said the man. "Well, I reckon you all will enjoy yourselves. Are you friends of his from up North?"

Tom nudged Rodney to keep him from answering the questions, but the younger boy said, "No, we're not friends of his yet. We want to have a look around the islands."

Here Tom frowned and the stranger caught the frown, for he quickly bobbed his head, and said pleasantly, "No harm meant, mates. I don't want to pry into anybody's business. My name's Peter

Doan, and I just naturally like to be friendly with everybody I meet."

He wasn't a very attractive-looking man in spite of his friendly smile. His eyes were rather red, as if he might sometimes drink too much, and his clothes were spotted and torn. Yet his voice was so conciliatory that Tom was anxious to show that he wasn't offended.

"We're only going on a little camping trip," he explained. "We thought one of those islands would be just the place for it."

"I've got a boat with an engine in it, and I could take you anywhere you wanted to go," said Doan. "I generally use it for hunting and fishing, but I'm always glad to take parties out in it. You can find me around here any time at all." With another smile and a touch of his cap he walked away, looking back over his shoulder once or twice and nodding.

The three boys returned to Colonel Whitney's late in the afternoon, and had supper in the candle-lighted dining-room that looked out on the garden. It seemed to the boys from the North that they had never tasted such delicious food as the fried chicken and corncakes that old Joe, the Colonel's negro servant, put before them, and even Stephen, who was used to Southern cooking, couldn't resist having his plate filled three times. The Colonel and his wife wanted to know what the boys thought of Beaufort, and seemed very much interested in the different

opinions. Rodney's views were always the most practical, while Stephen's were the most amusing, and Tom had quite a shrewd insight into both people and things he met. It was Stephen who mentioned their meeting Peter Doan.

"A chap in a sailor's cap, with a face as round as the moon, and as red as a geranium, offered to take us out in his power-boat," said Stephen. "He came snooking around as if he was mighty anxious to know what we were up to, and he said his name was Peter Doan. I shouldn't wonder if you knew him, Colonel. He said he knew everybody in town."

"Oh, yes," answered the Colonel, chuckling, "I know him. He's a queer character, too. He has a little house near the water—perhaps you saw it, a square sort of a box painted green, and he keeps a sharp eye out for everything that happens along the shore."

"He's an odd combination," added Mrs. Whitney. "He's a busy-body, and you can't rely on his word. He never misses a chance to make a dollar, and some people think he must have saved up quite a fair sum of money. He got it into his head once that somebody had hidden a box of gold-pieces somewhere near Beaufort, and he hunted and hunted for a clue, but I never heard he found any. He has lots of strange ideas—that's one of them."

Stephen and Rodney glanced at Tom and he smiled back at them.

"He didn't say anything about looking for clues to us," said Tom, "but he did seem to want to know what we were going to do. We told him we wouldn't want his boat as we'd made arrangements to take another one."

Nothing more was said about Peter Doan. The Colonel and his wife and the boys sat on the porch, from which they could see the moon shining over the water, and lighting the low islands to the east.

"If you only have good weather, you ought to enjoy camping out," said the Colonel. "We'll pick up a tent for you to-morrow, and I'm sure Mr. Blossom will lend you a boat, and you can buy your provisions direct from him. He always keeps a big store of them for his own guests. A month later you might find the weather a little cold for camping, but now it's just right. I'd like to go along with you myself, but I don't want to leave my wife alone."

"No, you'd better not," put in Mrs. Whitney. "And you don't know what adventures our young friends may run into out there."

Indeed, as the boys looked out at the shining water, and the low land beyond, it occurred to each of them that they might have many adventures out there. The place was more mysterious by night than by day, and they could well believe that if Blackbeard had been looking for a hiding-place one of those islands would have seemed a proper goal.

When the clock struck nine, the boys said good-

night and went up to their rooms, which had a view of the water.

"So the old fellow down there," said Tom, directing his thumb in the direction of the harbor, "has hunted for treasure himself, has he?"

"I reckon he'd have given a good deal to see that map," said Stephen. "I think we'd better be careful not to let him get any idea of what we're up to."

"He looked like a pirate himself," said Rodney, "and I wouldn't want to meet him on a dark night, alone." He turned and looked at his brother. "Mrs. Whitney seemed to think hunting for treasure was pretty ridiculous, didn't she?"

"Well," said Tom, "of course she might, but then she's a woman and doesn't know as much as we do. There was a Blackbeard, and he did steal money, and he must have hidden it somewhere."

Stephen, meantime, had stuck his hands in his pockets, and was looking out the window while he hummed softly to himself:

"Oh, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed;
And most shockingly I did,
As I sailed."

"Not so loud," cautioned Rodney, "or Peter Doan might hear you."

"I don't give a snap of my finger for him," retorted Stephen. "If he comes prowling 'round our island we'll chuck him into the sea."

Next morning the boys and Colonel Whitney went to a store in the town and bought a canvas tent, some pots and pans and blankets, an ax, two hatchets and a spade, and a few other things they thought they might need. They had an early lunch, and then the boys embarked in a little launch that took them across the water to the nearest island. There a colored man met them with a cart. They piled all their baggage in the cart and were driven across that island, and then by bridge to the next one. This island, the largest of the group, had many small plantations on it. They saw many negroes working in their cotton-fields or standing at the doors of their cabins watching the passing team. Presently they drove along a road where the gray moss hung low from the trees, giving a twilight look to everything. The road then bore to the northeast, and presently they came to another bridge; crossing this, they reached the island where Mr. Blossom lived, and drew up before the front door of his house. The owner was patching the canvas deck of a duck-boat on his porch, and at the sound of wheels he turned to see who the new arrivals might be. Tom handed him the Colonel's letter, and Mr. Blossom read it.

Henry Blossom was a big man, with light blue eyes and brown hair and a brown beard. He looked as if he lived most of the time out-of-doors, for his skin was much tanned by the sun. His eyes were very clear. There was something most attrac-

tive about him, and as he glanced up from the letter each of the three boys took a liking to him.

"Well, young men, I guess I can fix you up all right. I own those smaller islands you see out there, and I'd be very glad to let you look them over, and take any one you like for as long as you want. You won't be putting any tenants out. Nobody lives there but the oysters and the ducks. What do you say to spending the night with me, and starting out on your tour early in the morning? Then we can talk things over and see what you want to take with you."

This plan seemed sensible. They paid the negro driver, and piled their baggage on Mr. Blossom's porch. The owner showed them through his house, which was surprisingly comfortable for such an out-of-the-way place. Then he took them to the house where his negro superintendent lived, and introduced them to the colored mammy and her flock of woolly-headed children. Children, dogs and pigs seemed to swarm all over that part of the place, and several times Mr. Blossom laughingly apologized for the lack of order in his domain.

"We never have time to get anything cleared up down here," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "You boys from the North will find that you can do an awful lot of eating and sleeping down here on the islands."

Afterwards Mr. Blossom led them around his

island, taking them one way through the woods, where live-oaks and moss were thick, giving the place almost the look of a tropical forest. They came back by the beach, where tall palmettoes stood just beyond the sand. Mr. Blossom was walking ahead with Rodney.

"He looks like Robinson Crusoe," whispered Tom to Stephen. And indeed the big man, in his gray flannel shirt, open at the throat, his brown knickerbockers, and woollen stockings, did look as if he were just the person to be cast away on a desert island.

He was very jolly company, and the boys had a splendid evening in his den, where he showed them duck-decoys he had made, guns and rods he used in hunting and fishing, and told them many yarns about his adventures in the islands. On one wall of his den hung a map of the coast, and after a while Tom stole over to it. He examined the islands carefully, and found one that seemed about the shape of the island on his map. It lay farthest out to sea, and the northern tip of it was less than a quarter of a mile from Mr. Blossom's island.

Presently Mr. Blossom came over to where Tom stood. "What's the name of that island?" Tom asked, putting his finger on the one he had picked out.

Mr. Blossom smiled. "They don't have regular names," said he. "We call them all the Hunting Islands. Is that the one you like best?"

"You never heard of one called Teach's Island, did you?" Tom ventured, while the other two boys looked at their host.

Mr. Blossom shook his head. "No, I never heard of Teach's Island," he said, "but there are all sorts of names for all those places. The darkies call them one thing, and the white folks at Beaufort call them another. Some of them have the names of the different people who owned them. If you like the place you can christen it any name you want."

They all went out for a breath of fresh air before going to bed, and as Mr. Blossom hunted up one of his dogs that had a wounded foot, Tom pointed to the stretch of land not much more than a stone's throw across the moonlit water.

"I think that's it!" he whispered to Rodney and Stephen. "It won't take long for us to find out in the morning. Those two little streams on the map will show it clear enough."

"Do you think it can be?" said Rodney, looking distrustfully at the sandy point that was all he could see.

"Why not?" said Stephen, and he ran down to the shore, and, picking up a pebble, threw it as far out as he could. "We're coming over to see you in the morning, Mr. Blackbeard," he cried, "and we're going to make you give up all those coins you stole long ago!"

IV

THE TOUR OF DISCOVERY

EARLY the next morning a motor-boat with a big, bearded man at the wheel and three boys as passengers went skimming over the smooth water that lapped the Sea Islands. Everything looked very fresh and clear, as if the sun had bathed the whole world and brought out all the brightest colors. The ocean was a deep greenish blue near the boat, growing to a much lighter and more silvery blue farther away. Where there were beaches on the little islands the sands were a light yellow, and the marshes and woods were many shades of green, as yet untouched by the hand of frost.

Stephen, who was more of an artist than the other two, leaned forward eagerly, his eyes drinking in the clear beauty of the early morning. Rodney kept calling attention to various things, pointing out a flock of ducks to the right of them, and a buoy that marked a hidden rock on the left. Tom had taken the map from his inside coat-pocket, and was looking now at it, now at the island they were approaching.

Mr. Blossom, glancing over his shoulder, saw Tom studying the map.

"What's that?" he asked. "Have you got a map of your island before ever you set foot on it?"

"No," said Tom. He had consulted with the other two before breakfast that morning, and decided that there would be no harm in telling Mr. Blossom the reason for their coming here. "We want to find an island that's like this drawing; and I think that the one right ahead must be it."

"Where did you get the drawing?"

"In an old shop in Charleston. We think it's a map of an island where the pirate Blackbeard used to come. The map says 'Teach's Island,' and that was the pirate's real name."

Mr. Blossom gave a long whistle.

"Whew! So I may have been owning a pirate's island all the time without knowing it! Don't tell me you're going to hunt for pirate's treasure!" He laughed lightly. "Well, it's all yours if you find it. I'd never have found it anyway."

The boat slipped up close to the long stretch of land. At the northern end the island was chiefly marshes, which did not offer a good landing-place, so Mr. Blossom steered around to the ocean side, where there was a long beach. About half a mile up the beach was an inlet. He turned the boat in at this point, and stopped it beyond the sand where higher ground made a good landing.

It took a very short time to unload the tent, the blankets, the baggage, the supplies of food, and the spades that the boys had obtained from Mr. Blossom.

"This wouldn't be a bad place to pitch camp,"

said Stephen, pointing to an open place between the trees, where the moss made a soft carpet. "It's pretty well sheltered from wind and rain, and it's got a mighty fine view of the water."

"What do we want of a view?" exclaimed Rodney, practically. "We'll have other things to do than squint at the water."

"Well," returned Stephen, "you never can tell what might happen, you know. If strangers should come along here we might like to have a look at them before we let them see us."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Rodney. "You don't think any pirates or Indians are coming after us, do you? Perhaps you're afraid Peter Doan will get on our track, and sail round here looking for us."

"It's a good place to camp, though," Mr. Blossom put in, "and I shouldn't wonder if there's a spring near. There are apt to be springs on the islands."

Tom was again studying the map. "Would you mind taking us round the island in your boat, Mr. Blossom?" he asked. "I feel pretty sure this is the place we're looking for, but I'd like to see all sides of it."

"That sounds sensible," agreed Mr. Blossom.

They boarded the craft again, and backed down the little inlet; then they ran south along the beach. Back of the beach they spied higher ground with pines and cedars, and now and then a clump of two or three palmettoes. In fact, the centre of the island seemed

to be generally wooded, which might have been represented by the shaded portion of the map. At the southern end of the beach they saw the hull of a boat wedged into the sand—some old ship that had been wrecked, and lodged in this place years before.

“Yes, I’ve seen that old ship,” said Mr. Blossom, “when I have been cruising around here. She was here long before I bought the place.”

By rough reckoning, the island was about three miles long. At the southern end were more marshes like those to the north, and at the southwest corner a fairly wide river ran up at the edge of the marshes. When Tom saw this he gave a yell of delight.

“That proves it’s Blackbeard’s Island!” he cried. “That’s just the place on the map where there’s a river that runs up towards the woods!”

The others looked at the map, and saw that he was right. Beyond the river was a small curving beach, then high ground that came right down to the water’s edge, then more marshes, another tiny beach, and they were back at the northern point.

Mr. Blossom let the boat drift and studied the drawing closely.

“It isn’t as carefully made as the plans of our coast-surveys,” said he. “But probably the old pirate had to dash it off in a hurry. I should say, however, that that drawing represents this island as nearly as any amateur would get it.”

“The idea of calling Blackbeard an amateur!”

exclaimed Stephen. "I should say he was a professional every time."

"Amateur map-maker, I meant," explained Mr. Blossom. "I'm sure he was every inch a professional pirate."

Having come to the conclusion that this was the place they wanted, they returned to the inlet, and the bank where they had piled their baggage. Rodney hunted for firewood, while the others searched for a spring. Stephen found clear water bubbling up nearby, and Rodney reported plenty of fuel. Satisfied on those points, they decided to make their camp here, and put up the canvas tent.

"I'll run over to see you every now and then," said Mr. Blossom, "and if you want anything, tie one of your towels to the tall tree at the northern point. I could see it from my porch. You ought to have a boat of your own, though. I'll send Joe over with a row-boat this afternoon. Good luck to you, and keep an eye out for Blackbeard's ghost, if you find his treasure."

"He's a dandy, isn't he?" exclaimed Stephen. "Gee, but he must have a good time living over there, and spending all his time hunting and sailing!"

Camp pitched, the boys started to get their mid-day meal. Mr. Blossom had provided them with plenty of tins of potted things, and they had sardine sandwiches and minced-chicken sandwiches and peach preserves for lunch. Rodney was a famous

cook, but they decided there was no use doing any cooking then.

"Isn't it fine to know there's nobody else on the island?" said Stephen, looking through the trees back of him, then out at the beach. "We can do just as we please here. You can't do that on the mainland, because there's always somebody near." He got up and went skipping down to the beach, where he threw himself on the warm sand. With a shout of delight Rodney dashed after him. Tom followed, and presently all three were tumbling about in the soft sand like so many puppies.

As Mr. Blossom had said, the air of the islands was very balmy at this time of year, and made one sleepy, so soon the boys were, like the darkies they had seen in Beaufort, napping with one eye open.

When half an hour had passed in this way, Rodney jumped up, saying, "I'm going for a swim." In less time than it takes to tell, the three were in the water, frolicking about like a school of porpoises.

Dried and dressed again, they felt that it was time to begin serious work.

"Now," said Tom, "I think we'd better start our exploring. Let's go down the beach and see if we can find a way back of the marshes that will take us over to the river."

"We can have a look at the old ship on the way," suggested Stephen.

Down the beach they went, Tom in the lead,

looking carefully at the woods on his right, as if he wanted to locate all possible landmarks. Rodney trudged along, whistling a tune, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders thrown back. Stephen kept skipping little stones out over the waves.

The ship that was wedged in the sand had been a fair-sized smack, with two masts and a cabin, but a storm had wrecked her, and other storms that had since swept up over the island had carried away a good part of her timbers. Only the stumps of the masts were left, and the cabin was little more than a shed with a roof and benches in it. But a ship, even if it be only a wreck, is very hard to resist, and the boys climbed up its sides and walked its deck and examined its cabin, with as much interest as if it had been the finest merchantman.

Stephen was struck with an idea.

"If it rains, this would be a bully place to come," said he. "I don't see why we shouldn't camp out here anyway. It's a good deal snugger place than the tent under the trees."

"But it's a good deal further from the spring and firewood," said the practical Rodney. Standing in the cabin, he looked through one of the port-holes.

"It does make you feel as if you were out at sea," he added. "I suppose we could find another spring and have our fire on the beach."

"We'll see about it to-morrow," decided Tom. "It does look good to me, too."

"Of course it does!" exclaimed Stephen. "If we lived here we would almost feel like Blackbeard himself. We can camp out any time, but we can't have a boat to ourselves whenever we want."

They left the ship and found themselves almost at the marshes. There was no way of getting through these except in a boat and even then it would have taken a lot of hard poling. They turned west and sought a way through the woodland. Where there was high ground there was good footing. Making their way through the forest, they skirted the marshes and finally came to the river. Here they sat down on the bank, and Tom pulled the map from his pocket. He traced the marks with his fingers.

"You see the river follows north till it reaches the other marshes," said he, "but there's a point here at this cross where the path leads off to the east. It seems to go through the woods up toward the little stream where our tent is. As far as I can make out, that place with the circle in red is where that path touches the head-waters of our stream. Now, what we've got to do is to follow that trail through the woods until we come to the stream, mark the place, and then see whether, by going up the stream the distance marked on the map, we'll come to about the same place. If it is, we must be near that red circle."

"That sounds easy," said Stephen, jumping up and looking about as if he expected to see a well-

defined trail leading off from the river through the woods.

"Hold on," said Rodney, "Blackbeard didn't blaze the trees, you know. I don't suppose there were many of these trees here in his time. How about that, Tom?"

"I don't suppose there were," agreed his brother. "I think we'll have to make our trail by the compass. I'm going to measure all these distances on the map when I get back to camp, and then when Mr. Blossom sends us his boat we can go up the river as far a distance as this cross represents to the whole length of the river."

"You've got a great head," said the admiring Rodney.

Tom was twisting his pet lock of hair with his fingers.

"Of course Blackbeard mayn't have been very accurate," he said, "but I don't see any other way for us to locate these crosses and that red circle."

Stephen pointed towards the sun, which was now about to set above the islands that lay between them and the mainland.

"I vote for starting back," said he. "It'll be dark before long, and we don't want to get lost in the forest on our first night."

"And I want to have time to fry those sweet-potatoes," put in Rodney. "I tell you what! This exploring business gives me a terrible appetite."

"I bet you I can get back to the beach first!" cried Stephen, and was off through the woods to the east as swiftly as an Indian runner.

Tom and Rodney followed, each making for a different opening in the woods. The trees were not very close together, and there wasn't a great deal of underbrush, but the gray moss, which seemed to catch and fling itself over most of the trees, made the wood-glades dark. Both Rodney and Tom, however, had good bumps of direction, and though their paths veered apart, each kept heading eastward. Tom's long legs brought him to the beach first, without having taken him far out of the way. He looked up and down the stretch of sand, from the hull of the ship on the south, to the inlet and camp on the north. The beach looked wonderfully smooth and quiet. It might indeed have been just such an island in the South Seas as Robinson Crusoe first set foot on. Then he saw his brother come bursting through the trees, a short distance to his left. Rodney gave a yell that rang across the water and was echoed back from the woods.

"Well, we're here all right!" he shouted to his brother, "but what's become of that old scout, Stephen?"

Tom joined Rodney, and the two began throwing stones at the water to see who could throw the farthest. Five minutes passed in this way, and still no Stephen appeared.

"I believe he's lost," said Tom, and putting his fingers to his lips blew a long clear whistle. There was no answer, and he whistled again. This time there came what sounded like an echo from the woods to the north. The boys ran up the beach to a point opposite where the sound came from, and whistled again. Again came an answer. Keeping this up, they gradually directed the lost boy towards the beach. As he came nearer, instead of whistling, the two imitated the calls of all the animals they could think of, barking like a fox, hooting like an owl, roaring like a lion, so that any wild fowl in the woods or marshes must have thought they were surrounded by the whole animal kingdom.

Imitating the calls, Stephen, red in the face, burst out from the edge of the trees.

"I lost my bearings in there," he started to explain. "I was going north instead of east."

"No excuses," said Rodney. "You ought to be able to smell the salt water, and make for it like a good hunting-dog."

"Perhaps I could, if my nose was as long as yours," retorted Stephen.

"You'd better not say anything about my nose, or I won't cook you any sweet-potatoes," rejoined Rodney.

That was a serious threat, and Stephen, almost always good-natured, admitted his short-comings.

"Well, you two did beat me in getting here," said

he, "but I bet you can't either turn as many cart-wheels up the beach as I can." Stephen, being very light and supple, was particularly good at turning hand-springs, and he went circling over the sand a good deal like a bicycle-wheel.

Tom, also limber, was almost as good at this game, but short, stocky Rodney usually fell all over himself when he tried it. So he did this time; and, after flopping about in several vain efforts to imitate the other two, he gave it up and ran along beside them. Presently Tom, out of breath, stopped too, and Stephen, having proved his ability at this sport, even if he had been beaten in finding his way through the woods, gave a cry of triumph and dashed away for camp.

The sun had now set, and the sea was made of pink and yellow lights in the afterglow. The camp looked inviting, and Rodney at once started preparations for supper. Tom found a row-boat fastened to the bank of the stream, evidently brought over by Mr. Blossom's man. Stephen gathered loose wood, and presently had a fire started in an open space, far enough from the trees to avoid setting fire to them.

Half an hour later the three boys, squatting on the ground, had a royal feast. Tom might be good at working out plans, and Stephen at all sorts of games, but Rodney was far and away the best cook. He had fried strips of bacon, baked white potatoes in their jackets, and toasted bread, and had filled a

plate with his famous fried sweet-potatoes. In addition, they had chocolate and part of a cake that the colored woman on Mr. Blossom's island had presented them.

"Some supper, this!" said Stephen. "And it does taste a lot better eating it here on our own island instead of in a dining-room. Those old pirates must have had a good time if they went camping out like this all the time."

"I don't believe they did," said the practical Rodney. "I guess they were too busy to spend much time eating."

"It's funny they never tell you more in books about what such men ate," said Tom. "You'd think they were always fighting and sailing around, and never ate or slept at all." He looked down at the wooden plates that were now as clean as when they had come from the cupboard. "We know food's mighty important when you're out in the open, don't we?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" exclaimed Stephen. Jumping up, he touched his hand to his head, and giving a hitch to his trousers in true sailor fashion, began to chant his favorite lines about Captain Kidd.

They strolled down to the beach later and watched the moon beginning to cover the distant waters with its silver fire-flies. The night was very clear, and the air was soft and sweet, as if it had blown from a land of spices. Down the beach they could just make

out the lines of the ship. A star, low on the horizon, standing above the ship's bow, looked almost like a signal lantern. Around a point to the north they could see the low line of Mr. Blossom's island. It was rather pleasant to think that the big good-natured man was within hailing distance.

When they went back to their camp, they put out the fire, as the September night was not cold. They piled blankets for beds under the canvas tent. With the flaps of the tent lifted, they could see the moon on the water, and catch the occasional call of a bird somewhere in the distance. Presently a long drawn-out cry, the note of a loon or some night-bird, rang through the silence. Stephen raised himself on his elbow.

"That sounds like Blackbeard calling to his men," he said. "They might have scattered over the beach, and he wants them to come back to the ship. Look," he pointed out at the water. A cloud, passing across the moon, made a dark place on the silver ripples. "There's his ship gliding away from the island," he added.

"What nonsense!" sniffed Rodney. "I'm too sleepy to care for all the pirates in the world."

Tom, turning over on his side, gave a loud yawn. "Forget that stuff till to-morrow, Steve," he said. "Then we'll get a compass and a ruler and see if we can find out whether your old friend Blackbeard ever was really here."

V

THE SHIP AND THE SPY

THE three boys were up early next morning, and out for a swim in the ocean before the sun had had much chance to warm the water. They had breakfast, and then, taking the map, a compass, a ruler, and some paper and pencils, held a council under one of the palmettoes that stood close to the beach. Tom made a rough copy of Teach's map on a sheet of paper, and then marked it with figures taken from his measurements of the original drawing.

"I don't like to mark Blackbeard's own map, but I want to get all these figures straight," he explained.

He traced a line through the woods from the point they had reached on the river the day before, and then figured how far up the little stream that ran by their camp they would have to go before they reached the place where the path through the woods should strike it. This point, they finally decided, must be about a quarter of a mile inland from the beach. Then Tom filled in the rest of his rough outline drawing with the marshes, the trees, the beaches, and the rest of the local geography of the island as they had learned it.

"That's a good-looking map," said Stephen, when Tom finished it. "Of course there's almost

half the island we haven't explored yet, but you've got the part we do know in great shape."

They were still studying the drawing when the chug of a motor-boat caught their ears, and looking up, they saw Mr. Blossom turning into their inlet. He drew up to the bank, shut off the motor, caught the painter of his boat about a sapling, and came ashore.

"Well, my hearties!" he cried. "The pirate didn't walk last night, did he? You three seem to be all right, and the island looks just the same as it did yesterday. What you got there?"

They showed him Tom's drawing, and pointed out what they had discovered the day before. He was very much interested in the drawing, and said that, though he had often been over to the island on hunting-trips, he hadn't learned as much about the interior as they had found out in one afternoon.

"And we went on board the old ship, too," said Stephen. "It's in pretty good shape, and I'd rather camp there than up here on the bank. Let's see what Mr. Blossom thinks about it," he said to the other boys. "It would be a whole lot drier than our tent, if we get any rain."

"Yes, I would like to have a look at it," agreed Mr. Blossom. "The beauty of living on a ship stuck in the sand is that you can get the smell and the look of the sea without being bounced up and down. That the way you feel about it, Stephen, my boy?"

"Oh, no, I'm a good sailor," Stephen answered. "What I like is to hear the waves slapping against the sides of the boat at night."

Henry Blossom and the boys went down the beach to the old vessel marooned on the shore. At this stage of the tide a little water had crept between the hull and the beach, and they had to jump from the shore to the deck. Once on board, they explored the ship again: its forward deck, with a broken bowsprit and the stump of a mast; the cabin that smelled of tar; and the after-deck, where the planks were almost white with the long bleaching of sunshine.

"It's a pretty good ship," said Mr. Blossom, as he stood in the bow, high above the beach. "I'd rather like to camp out here myself. All you need is to get a sapling, fasten it to the broken mast, run up your flag, christen the craft 'The Jolly Roger,' and you've got as fine a pirate's ship as you'd meet in many a day. This might have been a pirate's ship, you know. Who can tell how many fights have taken place on that deck there? Or how much ransom's been paid across the table in the cabin?" Gesturing with his hands, his blue eyes shining with love of adventure, Henry Blossom looked not unlike a buccaneer himself.

"Careful now, Steve," said Rodney. "Don't you sing your pet song about Captain Kidd."

"Why not?" exclaimed the big man by the bow. "You know that song? It's a mighty good one for

four lusty men. Come along." His deep bass voice rolled out the words:

"Oh, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed;
And most shockingly I did,
As I sailed."

The three boys joined in the singing, and their voices carried a good half-mile across the water.

"That ought to frighten off anybody, even Peter Doan," said Tom, laughing.

"Peter Doan!" exclaimed Mr. Blossom. "Do you boys know him? I thought I saw him cruising 'round my island this morning in that funny old power-boat of his. We had a scrap once about the price of some fish he sold me, and he hasn't been to see me for a long time. I thought perhaps he'd come to make up, and sell me something else."

"He probably wanted to find out what we were doing," said Rodney.

"Well, if he does, mum's the word," said Mr. Blossom, putting his finger to his lips in a signal of caution. He made such a face that the three boys burst out laughing.

"Let's bring our stuff round here while we've got Mr. Blossom's boat," suggested Stephen.

Now, pleasant as it was to camp out under the trees on shore, there was a novelty about making their home on the ship that appealed strongly to all three. So, without more discussion, they went back

to their tent, loaded their goods on the motor-boat, and so brought them around to the vessel. In half-an-hour the canvas tent was shielding a part of the after-deck, and the stock of supplies was stored away in the cabin. Mr. Blossom picked up a bottle of ginger-ale and broke it over the ship's bow.

"I christen you 'The Jolly Roger,'" he said, "and may you sail your new owners to the place where Mr. Blackbeard hid his treasure."

Again they embarked in the motor-boat and slipped around to the entrance of the river on the southern side. Up the river they went until they came to the place where the marshes ended in dry ground. Here they moored the boat, and, landing, followed the bank of the river until they came to the point they had reached the afternoon before. The sun was high in the sky, and it was much easier to plot their course than it had been the previous day. With the help of the compass, they struck out through the woods on a line as near as possible to the one drawn on the old map. They went slowly, stopping every now and then to make sure of their direction. In this way they crossed the centre of the island, where the ground was highest, pushed through thick groves where the light was filtered by the gray moss, and finally came to a clearing where three or four fine oaks rose high above the other trees.

"We must have left the river a good way to the west of us," said Rodney. "If Blackbeard

tramped all this way, he was certainly pretty clever at hiding his gold; it looks almost like a jungle in the tropics."

Tom and Stephen had climbed one of the tall oaks, and from a point high above the rest of the forest, they told the others what they could see.

"We're just about the middle of the island," said Tom. "I can see the ocean to the east, and the marshes on the northwest."

"I can see Mr. Blossom's house," declared Stephen.

"Can you see if any of the pigs are rooting around in my front yard? I'm always afraid that's what they're doing when I go away."

"I can't make out whether it's pigs, or dogs, or babies," answered Stephen, "but there's certainly something playing around on your front porch."

"Come along," said Rodney, who held the compass, "Steve will be seeing things all the way to Beaufort, if he doesn't come down soon."

They took up the march again, still north, and presently, breaking their way through a tangle of underbrush, found themselves very near the bank of the little stream. This point must have been quite a distance inland from where they had first landed. Tom, taking long strides forward, stepped to the edge of the water.

"This must be just about the place marked by the red circle," he declared.

"Just about, I should say," agreed Mr. Blossom.

"But it's on the other bank, isn't it?" said Stephen.

"Yes," assented Tom. "The red cross is on this shore, but the circle's on the northern bank."

They all looked across the stream, which was here only about a dozen yards wide. Thorn-bushes came down to the edge of the opposite shore, and the place certainly looked as if no one had ever been there before.

"It'll need some clearing out," said Rodney. "We'll have to get our hatchets and clean up those bushes before we begin to dig."

"And while you're about it, I'd cut them away for some distance along the bank," suggested Mr. Blossom. "Of course that map isn't drawn to any accurate scale, and the place marked by the red circle may be anywhere within a radius of twenty yards or so." He took another look at the drawing. "If this is the place, it ought to be about a quarter of a mile back to the beach. I'm a pretty good judge of distance. Let's see if it is."

Tom cut a mark on an oak sapling that stood close to the stream, and then they turned east and went along the shore of the stream till they came to the place where they had camped the night before.

"Just about a quarter of a mile, I should judge," announced Mr. Blossom. "I take it that you've located somewhere pretty near Blackbeard's treas-

ure." He added, "That is, if this is really Black-beard's island, and if he really hid any treasure."

It was now almost noon, and all four were so hungry that they dashed down the beach to the ship and fell upon the tinned goods and the bread and butter as if they had been deserted mariners attacking the first supply-ship they had seen in weeks. Then they spread their blankets on the after-deck, and made themselves comfortable, while Mr. Blossom lit his pipe and told them stories about the days when the Union fleet had sailed up to Port Royal and captured this part of the coast in the Civil War. As he stopped talking, he grunted.

"Humph! you're not very complimentary to my yarns," he said. "Every one of you sound asleep!"

"Oh, no, I'm not," said Tom, opening his eyes, "only somehow I could listen better with my eyes shut." He prodded Stephen in the ribs. "Wake up, Steve, it's time for breakfast!" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't asleep," said Stephen, rubbing his eyes, and sitting up. "Really I wasn't," he added to Mr. Blossom. "But I could think about what you were saying better with my eyes shut." He turned and gave Rodney a punch. "Time to go ashore, Rod," he said. "Don't you know you oughtn't to snore when Mr. Blossom's talking?"

Rodney raised his head.

"I wasn't," said he, "I heard every word—only the sun makes my eyes smart."

All three were now sitting up, looking rather shame-faced.

"I don't mind," said Mr. Blossom, laughing, "but as long as you three have had your naps, I'm going to take mine now."

Half-an-hour later, they cut across through the woods to the place where they had left the motor-boat. Here Mr. Blossom embarked again for his home, and the boys went back to the ship, got two hatchets and an axe, and retraced their path to the place in the bushes where Tom had marked the sapling. First they cut down a small tree and placed it across the stream for a bridge; crossing by this, they began to make a clearing on the opposite bank. This took a long time, and it was sunset before they had cleared the ground in a radius of twenty yards.

"Now," declared Tom, as he looked at the cleared space, filled with the roots of many thorn-bushes, "we've got to dig all 'round there till we strike something. And the place may not be anywhere in that clearing either, because we can't tell exactly how to locate the circle."

"Well, I hope we don't have to clear out the whole woods," said Stephen.

The whistle from a boat going toward Beaufort came to their ears.

"That's the six o'clock whistle," said Rodney, "time to stop work." Shouldering his axe he tramped back along the shore.

They had finished supper, and Rodney and Stephen were stowing away the cooking things in a corner of the ship's cabin, and Tom was bringing more wood to the place where they built their camp-fire at the edge of the beach, when the noise of a motor-boat engine caught their attention. Climbing up from the cabin to the forward-deck, Rodney looked in the direction of the sound. A boat, smaller than Mr. Blossom's, was coming around the southern point of the island. The other two boys glanced at the boat, but paid it no further attention.

Stephen, busily scouring a frying-pan, heard Rodney on deck calling down to him. "I say, Steve, that boat's coming up this way. And from the look of the man at the wheel I'd say it might be Peter Doan!"

Stephen hastily dropped the frying-pan, and climbed to the deck. Tom had gone back to the woods, and was out of sight. The two boys stared hard at the low craft that came chugging over the water toward them.

"It is he," muttered Stephen. "I could tell that red face of his on a pitch-black night."

"What's he doing out here?" demanded Rodney, very suspiciously. "I don't want him butting in."

Peter Doan, however, was not easily rebuffed. When his boat was within some fifty yards of the ship, he let it run in the water, and, taking off his visored cap, waved it at the boys.

"Evening, mates!" he called. "I see you got a ship of your own there. Got everything you want?"

"Everything," answered Rodney, positively.

"That's good," said Doan, and he brought his boat a little nearer to them. "How are you planning to pass your time on this here island? Looks kind of lonely to me."

In spite of Tom's previous warning to them not to answer too many questions, Stephen found it very hard to make no reply.

"Oh, we've plenty to do with swimming, and fishing, and cooking," said he.

"That's all you are doing, is it?" inquired Doan, and he leaned forward as if he would try to see if Stephen were telling him the whole truth. "Well, it's a pretty nice island. Of course, I've been out here before, but I never was over it from shore to shore. What's up in the woods there?"

"There's nothing but woods and marshes and two little streams," said Rodney, hoping to get rid of the man by speaking very shortly.

"Oh, is that all?" said Doan; with a turn of the wheel he brought his boat almost alongside the ship.

At this point Tom, his arms filled with small wood, came down the beach, and to his surprise found a motor-boat close to the shore. He dropped the wood by the fire, and walked to the edge of the water, where he glared rather defiantly at their visitor.

"Hello!" said Doan. "How would you like for me to come ashore and make you a little social call?"

This question required some diplomacy. Tom didn't want to offend the man, and yet he certainly didn't want him poking around the island. He hit on a neat way out of the difficulty.

"We're awfully sleepy," he said, "and we were just thinking of going to bed."

"Why," said Doan, "it ain't eight o'clock; and there's going to be a fine moon pretty soon. I can tell you some yarns about the days when they used to smuggle slaves in through these islands that'll make your hair stand up straight."

"It's hard enough to make mine lie down now," said Tom, with a chuckle. "No, thank you, Mr. Doan," he added. "We really were going to bed." He pulled himself up on the deck of the ship, as if he meant to end the matter then and there.

"Well, I must say you're not very hospitable," grunted Doan. "But I'm a good sport. I'd like to have a look at the island. I haven't stepped foot on it since that fellow Blossom bought it."

Of course it was impossible for the boys to refuse to let him land, and there was little present chance of his learning anything of their secret by himself. Yet his persistence aroused strong dislike in each of them, and almost made them regard him as an enemy. He wouldn't take a hint. He was, indeed, as Mrs.

Whitney had said, a busybody, prying into other people's affairs.

None of the three said anything about his landing. Instead they sat down on what was left of the rail of the after-deck, and began to whisper to one another. Doan's boat chugged along the beach, poked its way a short distance up the little stream, backed out again, and finally came down to the ship.

"I can't tell much about the place at this time of night," said the skipper. "If you say the word, I'll bring some nice ripe watermelons down here tomorrow, and we'll have a picnic. Don't that sound good to you?"

Rodney, losing his temper, stood up and shouted, "No!" at the top of his voice.

Doan fell back in his seat almost as if a bullet had struck him.

"My, but you're a fierce young cub!" he exclaimed. "All right, then, I won't bring you out any watermelons, but I'll come with a friend or two and have a picnic myself just to show you you don't own these here islands!"

He looked angry now, and Rodney was conscience-stricken at what he had done.

"Oh, I didn't mean to drive you away, Mr. Doan," he said. "Of course, we know you've got a right to be here."

"Well, I should say I had!" exclaimed the other, "and I'll tell you something more,—I keep an eye on

what folks do around here. If I catch you up to any mischief I'll tell Blossom about it."

"You can tell him anything you like," retorted Stephen. "What mischief could we do in a place like this?"

"I don't know what, but you might," answered Doan, mysteriously. "There's no telling what young fellows like you may do when they get a chance, you know."

Quick-tempered Rodney was about to make another reply, when Tom caught him by the coat and pulled him down on the rail.

"Keep still," he muttered.

"Look here, Mr. Doan," Tom went on, "I'm sorry we've had any words. I'm sure we want to be friendly with everyone here. Come whenever you like, and I'll eat your watermelon, even if they won't."

"You're a soft-spoken young fellow," said Doan, rather grudgingly. "Well, I'll think it over. People hereabouts ain't used to getting the cold shoulder. Put that in your pipe and smoke it." With a grunt he started his motor up, and headed his boat off to the north again.

For a minute or two the three looked at each other in silence.

"He's an old spy," said Stephen. "You might think he'd found out something about us from the way he comes poking 'round. I'm sorry I answered

him back, but something about him makes me want to bite him."

"I know," agreed Tom. "He's the sort that makes you bristle like a porcupine. Well, I don't see what harm he can do as long as we keep our secret to ourselves."

Yet, in spite of Tom's words seeming to be true, they all felt somehow as if the privacy of their island had been invaded. There was no knowing when Doan might come spying on them.

"I suppose we could get Mr. Blossom to order him not to land anywhere here," said Tom. "But I don't think that would be wise. It would make him more suspicious than ever."

"But what has he got to suspect?" demanded Rodney.

"Nothing, of course," said Tom, "but there are people who suspect a clergyman of taking money out of the collection plate. He'd rather suspect things than eat his supper."

They had stretched the canvas top of the tent over part of the after-deck, and under this they spread their blankets. With the water lapping against the sides of the ship, and the stars shining over the low roof of the cabin, the three boys went to bed, feeling, as Mr. Blossom had said, as if they really were on a ship at sea, without being bounced up and down by the waves.

VI

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

NEXT morning the boys brought the row-boat that Mr. Blossom had loaned them round to the side of the ship. They had had the foresight to borrow two shovels from Mr. Blossom, and these, with the one they had bought at Beaufort, provided each of them with what was needed for the next work in hand. Provisions for a light lunch were put in the boat; then they rowed up to the entrance of the small stream and followed that inland. In places the stream was so narrow that they had to use the oars for poles, and push against the bank. They were able to get their craft all the way up to the point where they had cut away the bushes the day before. Here they fastened the boat. On the bank to the north of the stream there was now a good-sized clearing, and some part of it they thought must represent the place that Blackbeard had marked with the red circle on his map.

Their coats off, their sleeves rolled up above the elbows, the three started work. The soil was sandy, and that part which bordered on the little river kept slipping into the water as they dug at it. Where the bushes had grown, there was a tangle of roots which made digging more difficult, but they were so

much interested that they tackled the job with the greatest energy.

Each of the three took a section of the clearing, and dug there. From time to time they rested, for the day was warm, and they were not accustomed to handling heavy shovels. When they rested, they talked, sometimes about Blackbeard, sometimes about Peter Doan and his reasons for following them. Then they would start work again, till they had plowed up the whole surface, so that it looked like a field ready for sowing.

Stephen straightened up and dropped his shovel.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, wiping his face with the back of his arm. "I tell you what! This is mighty good for the muscles of your back! I didn't know I had so many. I haven't worked so hard since father paid me a dollar to chop up the old apple tree in our yard."

"I suppose Blackbeard had some of his men do this sort of work for him," suggested Rodney.

"Yes," agreed Stephen, "while he stood by and told them how to do it! What's the use of being a pirate chief unless you can order the others to work for you?" He rubbed the blistered palms of his hands together and sang:

"Oh, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed;
And most shockingly I did,
As I sailed."

"Well, I hope he did hide many things," said Tom, resting for a minute, and wiping his warm face. "It's something like hunting for a needle in a haystack, isn't it?" He looked around at the clearing, which was now surrounded by a low mountain of sandy soil they had thrown from the digging.

"Little Jack Horner picked out a corner, where the sand was nice and dry; he put in his thumb, and pulled out a plum, saying, 'What a bright boy am I!'" Here Stephen dug his shovel into the earth with a stamp of his foot, and then flung the soil away. "There wasn't any plum in that," he added. "How deep do you suppose the old fellow hid his gold?"

They worked for a couple of hours pretty steadily, and then hunted up the spring near by, and had a drink of the cool water. Then they went back to their work, and by noon had dug up the clearing to a depth of a couple of feet. They had found nothing, except roots and a few stones. It began to look as if the search in this place was a wild goose chase.

When Tom's watch marked noon, they stopped for lunch. They were so hungry that what they had brought with them disappeared in a trice.

"I wish we had brought more," said Rodney. "I could eat about five times as much."

"I keep thinking of that watermelon Peter Doan spoke of," said Tom. "Wouldn't it taste good just about now!"

"Don't speak of it!" begged Stephen. "You

can work better if you don't eat too much. Come along, or Rodney'll be falling asleep."

Rodney, who was sitting with his back against a tree, did look as if he were about to take a nap. At Stephen's suggestion, however, he jumped up, and the three picked up their shovels and commenced digging again.

They did the work as systematically as they could, trying to sound every part of the clearing. By the middle of the afternoon they had gone down to a depth of more than three feet, but there was no sign of any treasure. Finally Tom stopped.

"I shouldn't think he'd have hidden it any deeper than we've dug," he said. "If we go down much farther, we'll let the water from the stream run in over the bank."

All three looked rather disappointed at their failure to find anything. Rodney shook his head. "I guess it's all a fake," said he. "I don't believe we'll find anything here, if we dig down to the centre of the earth."

"My back's almost broken," said Stephen, rubbing his aching muscles. "I think we've done enough for to-day anyway."

They put the shovels back in the boat, and sat down on the bank.

"I'm sure this must be just about the right place," said Tom, positively. "Those lines on the map surely met about here."

"You know this mightn't be the island at all," said Rodney, discouragingly.

"But it must be," argued Stephen. "You wouldn't find two islands the same size, and with all the rivers and marshes that were on that map."

Still Rodney shook his head, while he stared at the trees across the stream.

"We need a little encouragement," suggested Stephen. "Suppose I make up another song to sing."

Tom meantime was pulling his favorite lock of hair in deep thought. "If the map was a real map," he murmured, "this must be the island, and if it's the island, this must be about the right place. I think I'll go over to Mr. Blossom's and have another look at his coast-survey. I'd like to get his views about this place, too."

"I'll go with you," said Stephen. "I think a little rowing would take the kinks out of my back."

"We ought to leave somebody here," said Tom. "I shouldn't want Doan to go hunting 'round without our knowing it."

"Very well, I'll stay and guard the island," agreed Rodney. "I'll keep one of those shovels and make a little dike along the bank, so the water can't flow in."

Stephen and Tom got into the boat and rowed out to the ocean and then over to Mr. Blossom's island. They landed at his dock and went ashore.

The doors of the house stood open, and the boys looked in. The owner was not at home. Hunting up Joe, the colored man, they learned that Mr. Blossom had gone to St. Helena's Island to see some friends. They were going down to the dock again when they saw the owner come driving over the bridge that connected his property with the larger island. Mr. Blossom listened to their account of what they had done.

"You mustn't get discouraged," he advised. "You can't expect to find buried treasure every day."

"But we haven't found it any day yet," objected Stephen.

"That's so," said the big man, pulling at his beard. "I meant you mustn't expect to find it right off-hand. We may have gotten some of our figuring wrong."

"That's what I think," said Tom. "Suppose we have another look at your government map."

They went into the den and consulted the map; but this gave them no new clues. When they came out again Mr. Blossom rubbed his head thoughtfully. "I don't know what to suggest, boys," he said. "I'm as new at this business as you are. I don't suppose there's anybody here we could consult on hunting buried treasure."

"Not unless we ask Peter Doan," said Stephen, with a grin. "Mrs. Whitney told us that he went hunting for it once."

"That reminds me—he came to see us last night," said Tom; and he told Mr. Blossom what had happened the previous evening.

"I think I saw him this noon," said Mr. Blossom. "He and another man named Sam Parry were cruising along my shore. I caught Parry stealing some of my chickens once, and I warned him to keep away. I wonder if Joe can tell us what they were doing here."

A call for Joe brought that man around to the front porch. He said that he, too, had seen Doan and Parry in their boat.

"They came ashore after you went over to St. Helena, Mr. Blossom," said Joe. "'Pears like they wanted to know what the young gen'lemen was doing over to the Hunting Islands."

"And what did you tell them, Joe?" asked Mr. Blossom.

"Law', Mr. Blossom, I didn't tell 'em anything. I jest said they was camping out there, and they had taken some food and some shovels from your house. Then they wanted to know what the gen'lemen was going to do with the shovels, and I told them I reckoned they was going to dig. That's all the talk we had, Mr. Blossom."

"Well," said Tom, when Joe had left the porch, "if Peter Doan's always thinking about hunting treasure, and he knows we've got those shovels, it looks to me as if he might want to do some hunting

himself. We'll have to keep a look-out for him."

"What we've found so far won't help him much," put in Stephen.

Mr. Blossom seemed to be considering the matter in the light of this new information. Suddenly he leaned forward and pointed toward the northern end of Blackbeard's island.

"Isn't that a white flag flying from the top of that tree?" he asked. "Surely it is."

Tom and Stephen looked where he pointed.

"It is!" said Stephen; "Rodney must have flown it."

Tom leaped to his feet. "He must want us to come back!" said he. "What do you think can have happened?"

"It won't take us very long to find out," said Mr. Blossom, and he hurried down to his dock. A couple of minutes later his powerful motor-boat, with the row-boat tied to the stern, was dashing across the water toward the point where the white flag flew.

There was no sign of Rodney on the northern point of the island, and it wasn't till they had come around to the beach that they saw him. He was walking up and down, his hands stuck in his pockets, looking very much like a sentinel on duty. The boat was run in to the bank of the stream and made fast.

"What's up?" called out Tom.

Rodney put his finger to his lips, as if for silence, and beckoned them over to him.

"Not too loud," he cautioned. "Doan and another man are somewhere 'round here, and they might hear you. After you two left I stayed for a while digging up there in the woods, and then I came down to the beach and walked toward the ship. As I got near I saw there was somebody on board, and then two men jumped out onto the sand and came up to me. One was Peter Doan, and the other a tall, dark man with a long, black moustache. 'So you've been digging, have you?' Doan said, seeing the shovel I was carrying. I didn't say a word, but just frowned at them. Then Doan came nearer and said, 'You might as well tell us what you're up to, because we're going to find out anyhow.' But I didn't say anything; and the other man said to Doan, 'I reckon he's dumb. What's the good of wasting time on him.' Then they walked off toward this river and headed into the woods; so I think they must have been watching to see which way I'd come. I climbed up on the ship and got a big towel and tied it to that tree on the point that stands out by itself. I thought you ought to know the men were here. I haven't seen or heard anything more of them since."

"Well, that fellow is certainly Old Mr. Suspicion," said Stephen. "I wonder if he's found the place where we were digging."

"If he has," said Mr. Blossom, "there'd be no use in following him up the stream and arguing with him about it, and if he hasn't it would only make

him more suspicious if we went after him. I think we'd better pretend that we don't care whether he and his friend come to the island or not."

"That sounds sensible," said Tom. "Suppose we go back to the ship and see what they were doing."

A few things had been pulled out of place upon the ship, as if some one had been searching through them, but as Tom had Blackbeard's map in his pocket, the two men couldn't have found anything that would have furnished a clue. Their boat was drawn up on the sand on the other side of the ship. Mr. Blossom and the boys sat down on the after-deck to wait until the men returned.

"I read a story once," said Stephen, "about a man who was sailing 'round Cape Horn, and he saw some savages coming out from the shore in canoes. He could keep away from them in the daytime, but he was afraid they might come on board at night, so he scattered tacks all over the deck of his boat. Then he was wakened in the night by the most awful yelling and screaming. The savages had come on board and walked on the tacks in their bare feet. They thought the boat was bewitched, and they jumped back into their canoes as fast as they could. That always seemed a mighty good plan to me, and I've always wanted to try it."

"If you're thinking of Peter Doan and his friend as the savages," said Tom, "the trouble is that they don't go around in bare feet."

"That's just the trouble," agreed Stephen. "My, but wouldn't I like to see them hopping about after they'd stepped on the tacks!"

"Here they come," called out Mr. Blossom, who was sitting so that he could see up the beach. "Now we'll be as friendly as we can to them."

The red-faced Doan, and the tall, black-haired Parry, who looked as if he might have been a pirate himself, came along the sand right to the side of the ship. The rail of the after-deck hid the people on board from them. Then, at a gesture from Mr. Blossom, he and the boys stood up and, looking over the edge of the deck, called out pleasantly, "Good evening, Mr. Doan." The two men jumped, and looked very much surprised at the ship's crew. "I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon on my island," said Mr. Blossom. "I like everybody to make themselves at home here. Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"No," growled the dark-haired man. "We got lost in the woods."

"Too bad," said Mr. Blossom, and he really looked so much interested in them that they couldn't take offense. "I'm sorry we're running a little short of provisions, or we'd ask you to stay to supper."

Doan took off his sailor cap, and rubbed his head with the palm of his hand. "You're mighty polite all of a sudden, it seems to me," he said. "Those young fellows didn't want to have anything to do with me last night."

"Ah, but they didn't know what a fine fellow you were till I told them," protested Mr. Blossom. "I told them you were just the man who would keep an eye on them to see that they didn't get into any trouble; a sort of overseer, or night-watchman." His blue eyes twinkled, but there was a note of sarcasm in his voice.

"What was that fellow doing with the shovel?" asked Parry, pointing his finger at Rodney.

"I suppose he was digging," answered Mr. Blossom. "Perhaps he wants to take some of our Sea Island plants back north with him."

"What was that queer-looking old map I seen them studying in Beaufort?" questioned Doan. "It wasn't like any other map I've seen of these parts."

"Well, all maps aren't alike, you know," said Mr. Blossom. "That one might have been drawn by a man who wasn't well acquainted with map-making."

"It was," asserted Tom, nodding his head. "We found he didn't get the places marked right at all."

The four on the ship looked so innocent, and their answers were so frank that it was hard to believe they were keeping a secret. Yet Doan didn't look satisfied. He went on rubbing his head, and shaking it, and squinting his eyes at the ship in his suspicious way.

"There's something up," he said. "You boys didn't come way down here just to live on that boat."

You could have found plenty of places just as good, and a whole sight nearer home." He turned to his companion. "I reckon there ain't any use in sticking 'round here any longer," said he. "I reckon we better be getting back to Beaufort."

"I'm sorry we spoke as if we didn't want you here yesterday," said Tom. "We don't mind your coming any time you want to."

"And bringing watermelons, too," added Stephen.

"Yes, do come again," urged Rodney, not to be outdone in politeness.

Doan put on his cap, and Parry, who had been pulling his long black moustache, stuck his hands in his pockets and turned on his heel. "We may come again; and then again we mayn't," said Doan.

"That's right," agreed Parry, looking back over his shoulder. "We may come again, and then, perhaps, we mayn't. It all depends." A minute later they had launched their boat and were slipping away to the east.

"They may, and then again they mayn't," echoed Stephen. "A pretty pair they make. I think I like Whiskers better than the other fellow."

"We've done the best we could to put them off their guard," said Tom. "I don't believe they found the place where we were digging, after all." He laughed at a new idea. "It's too bad we can't scatter tacks all through the woods, Steve. That would be better than barbed wire."

"They can't say we weren't friendly," said Mr. Blossom. "Now, if they do come again, and say they want to hunt for buried treasure, it's your cue to pretend to help them all you can."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Stephen. Then he added, "But while we're keeping friendly with them, I don't see that we're getting any nearer to finding the treasure ourselves."

"You're getting to be a perfect gloom, Steve," said Rodney. "We're having a mighty good time, anyway."

"You bet we are!" said Stephen, and he took a flying leap from the deck to the sand, and turned a few cart-wheels to show his sentiments.

"Mr. Blossom's going to stay and have supper with us," urged Tom, "and then we'll go over this little business again."

The invitation was very tempting. Rodney and Tom cooked the supper, and they ate it on the after-deck, sitting in a row on the side toward the sea, where the rail was broken, and they could swing their legs over the edge.

Afterwards they tried to work out what possible mistake there might be in Blackbeard's map; but, though they considered it from every angle, they couldn't come to any new conclusion.

VII

OTHER HUNTERS

THE return to the scene of their labors next day brought no further enlightenment as to locating the treasure, if treasure there was. They dug their shovels down through the sandy soil in the hope that they might hit on some hidden box. They found not so much as a splinter of wood or scrap of metal. It seemed as if they might as well have been hunting in any other part of the island, so far as finding hidden treasure was concerned.

When Tom looked at the map, however, he felt certain that this place on the bank of the stream that was marked with the red circle must have been the place that the maker of the map considered of chief importance. The arrows all pointed toward it. What would have been the use of a path through the woods if it did not lead to some important point? He couldn't believe that the other crosses and marks were anything more than sign-posts on the road to the red circle, and yet if the circle really indicated a place on the bank of the northern shore of the stream, it seemed to stand for nothing, because they had searched that space thoroughly.

"He wouldn't have hid it deeper down than that," said Stephen, looking at the dug-out soil.

"I don't believe he ever hid anything at all," announced Rodney, positively. "That map is mysterious, of course; but it's perfectly clear that there isn't anything for us to hunt for here."

That fact did seem very clear. So they presently shouldered their spades and marched back to the ship.

"I shouldn't wonder if somebody made that map for a joke," said Rodney, as he stretched out on the sand to rest after his hard work.

Stephen was watching the white sail of a ship far out on the horizon. He scooped up a handful of sand and flung it at a wave that was coming up the beach. "I don't see why we shouldn't have some of the same fun, too," said he. "If some one made that map for a joke, why shouldn't we make another?"

Rodney and Tom both looked at him as if they didn't understand what he meant. "Isn't one joke-map enough?" asked Rodney.

"Don't you see!" exclaimed Stephen. "I meant to make another map of this island with other crosses and circles on it, and leave it where our friend Peter Doan will find it. Then we can have the fun of seeing him and that chum of his do a little digging themselves."

"Great idea!" said Rodney, sitting up and grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Tom slapped his knee. "I would like to see those two looking for a pot of gold where there

wasn't any!" he exclaimed. "And besides it would keep them off our track."

"There's some heavy brown paper that some of the things from Beaufort were wrapped it," said Rodney. "I think we can make it look like that old pirate's map." He boarded the ship, found the paper and some matches, and returned to the two on the beach.

"Here you are, Steve," said he. "You're the best hand at drawing things."

Tom took the original map from his inside pocket and stretched it out before them. Stephen tore off a piece of the wrapping-paper about the size of the map. Rodney lighted a match, and letting it burn a minute, blew it out and handed the stick to Stephen. "That will make a good black line," said he, "pretty much like the ones Blackbeard drew."

In a short time, Stephen had scratched the outline of the island with his charcoal pencil. He put in the rivers and marshes about as they were in the other drawing. He lettered his copy "Teach's Island."

"Now where shall we have the treasure hidden this time?" he said, as he finished his work and looked at it admiringly.

"They saw Rodney coming out from the clearing with his shovel. It ought to be somewhere on the northern end," said Tom. "We ought to mark the

place somewhere up there. Why wouldn't that little beach on the other side do? It must be half-a-mile from the place where we've been looking, and yet it's up in the same direction."

"That's a good place," agreed Stephen. "Now for something red to mark it with."

"Blood!" hissed Rodney, in a piratical manner. "We ought to use a drop of the blood of one of our captives."

"But who wants to be a captive?" asked Stephen. "You suggested it, Rod; you can be the victim."

"I've got a pencil in my pocket that writes red and blue," said Tom. "We can dip the red end in the water, and that will make it about the right color." The pencil was found, was wet, and used to make the crosses along the line of the river on the west, and a big circle just back of the small beach in the northwest corner.

"I'm sure that looks like a treasure-map all right, all right," announced Rodney, as he viewed the finished work. "If Peter Doan ever gets his eyes on that, he won't stop running till he hits the beach."

"We might burn the edge of the paper to make it look more antique," said Stephen. He did this; then folded the paper as Blackbeard's map had been folded, and opened it out again. "Now where shall we leave it, so he'll be sure to find it the next time he comes 'round?"

“There’s only one place we’d be apt to leave it,” said Tom, “and that’s on the ship.” He picked up some stones from the beach. “We can use these for paper-weights.” Soon the new map, held down at the corners by the small stones, lay on a plank in the cabin, as tempting a clue for a treasure-seeker as one could wish.

It was all very well to make a map that would fool their rivals, but they had gotten no nearer toward reaching their own goal. There was small profit in working at the clearing any more, so they decided to take a holiday that afternoon and go on a tour of discovery in their row-boat. They pulled around their island, and through the waterways that wound in and out about the other islands. They landed at St. Helena and had a look at some of the cotton-fields, where negro families were working, though not so hard as to hurt themselves. They walked up to a store and bought a ripe watermelon; then taking to their boat again they pulled on westward to Beaufort, where they watched the lazy life on the waterfront. By sunset they were rowing back again. There was no sign of Mr. Blossom as they pulled along his shore. One of his setters barked at them, and ran along the beach. Their own island looked as peaceful as ever. They beached their boat and carried the watermelon on board the ship.

Stephen was the first to step down into the cabin. He gave a yell of delight. “It’s gone, it’s gone!” he

cried, and pointed to the place where the new map had been.

"Sure enough!" said Tom. "The fish have bitten! I hope they enjoy themselves!"

The stones were still there, but the map had vanished, and it had been in such a place that the wind couldn't have blown it away. Undoubtedly somebody had stolen it. They had a feast that night, topped off by the watermelon; then they discussed again any possible mistake they might have made in their own search. They found nothing wrong with it, however, and went to bed, as far from getting a new clue as they had been the night before.

Stephen had no idea whether he had just fallen asleep, or had been asleep for some time, when he woke up. He lay staring at the starlit sky outside their canvas shelter. The night was very still, and as he lay there listening to the lapping waves he thought he caught the chug of a motor somewhere in the distance. Listening very intently, he felt certain that he heard it somewhere to the north. He got up, and going to the stern of the ship, listened again. Yes, there was a motor breaking the perfect silence of the night.

The moon had not yet risen, but the stars gave considerable light. He found his watch; the hand stood at half-past twelve. What would a motor-boat be doing around the island at that hour? As he looked in under the tent, Rodney woke.

"Come out here," whispered Stephen. A minute later Rodney and Tom had joined him on the deck.

"Listen!" said Stephen. The two other boys caught the sound of a motor, and nodded.

"Let's go see," said Rodney.

In a trice the boys had slipped into their clothes, and, crossing the beach, were stealing along among the trees.

The woods were dark, but the shine of the stars on the water helped them to find their way toward the mouth of the stream. Reaching there, they turned to the west. Now there was so little light that they had to feel their way very carefully. Every once in a while one of the three, stepping too near the bank, would slip, and have to catch at some bush to keep from falling into the water. They were all pretty good woodsmen, however, and they felt their way along with hands and feet, making almost no noise. Occasionally they would stop and listen. The noise of the motor-boat had ceased. They knew, however, the point where they had last heard it.

One of their stops was made opposite the cleared space where they had dug for the last two days. They could just make out the place in the dim light that came through the tree-tops. As they stood listening for any distant noise, they caught the hoot of an owl way off toward the mainland. It seemed as if it were the voice of Blackbeard, or one of his crew, hooting at their failure to find his treasure.

They had not explored the country beyond the clearing, so here they went more slowly, Tom in the lead. The stream ran to the northwest, and presently seemed to flow into marshy land. Their footsteps began to sink in wet soil, and the first thing Tom knew he had sunk over his ankles in a bog.

"Give me your hand!" he muttered to Rodney. "Look out! Don't come any farther!" Rodney, catching Tom's hands, gave a pull and jerked his brother to firmer ground. "We'd better look out for the marshes," Tom whispered. "Feel your way carefully before each step."

To the north they could catch the light on the water again, and knew that they must be opposite the point of the island. Stepping carefully, and making sure of firm ground, Tom led the way back to the woods, and after fifteen minutes he came to the edge of the trees and stopped.

This wooded bank stood fairly high above a long sloping beach, bounded at either end by marshes. The stars cast a dim silvery light over the water and the sand. There was a noise to Tom's left. It sounded like shovels digging into the sandy soil. Very cautiously the boys crept in the direction of the noise, and, when they had come as near as they dared, crouched down behind some bushes. Peering through them, they saw two men digging in the bank at the edge of the beach. A withered pine stood just beyond the place where they were digging.

As their eyes grew accustomed to the half-light, the boys could make out the figures of the men. One was tall and angular, the other considerably shorter, and rather clumsy in his movements. They made an odd appearance, digging silently in this deserted place in the middle of the night. The boys had no doubt as to who the two men were; one must be the piratical-looking Sam Parry, the other the seafaring Doan. At the place where the beach met the marshes the dim outline of a boat could be seen.

The two men worked for perhaps ten minutes, when the shorter one threw down his shovel and swore long and loudly. It seemed that he considered this the hardest job he had ever tackled. After a minute Parry also stopped work, and began to argue with Doan. Only an occasional word reached the listening boys.

"Shall we give them a scare?" whispered Stephen. "We'll make them think that we are Blackbeard's ghost, protecting the hiding-place."

"And get shot for it," muttered Rodney. "I don't think we'd better play any tricks on them."

"Nor I," agreed Tom. "Let them go on digging; it'll do them good."

After a few minutes' rest Parry and Doan did go on digging. Then the boys saw Doan take a paper from his pocket and study it carefully. It must have been the map he had found on the ship. When he put it away he picked up his shovel again.

That seemed to show he was satisfied they had hit on the right place.

It looked as if the men intended to dig all night, and after a time the boys got up from their crouching positions and stole again through the woods. Not until they had reached their own beach, on the other side of the island, did they begin to talk.

"Well," said Stephen, "I guess that will keep those fellows busy for some time. We've put a bee in Doan's bonnet. He's like a dog with a bone; he'll keep coming back to see if it's hidden there."

"I hope it keeps them busy on their own side," said Rodney, "so they won't come 'round our ship any more."

"Don't worry about them," said Stephen, "they'll be more afraid now that we'll follow them up to see what's become of our map."

"That was a pretty clever thought of yours, Steve," admitted Rodney.

"Oh, I'm good at that sort of thing," said Stephen. "I can almost always throw other people off the scent."

"Pretty proud of yourself, aren't you?" said Tom, laughing.

"Well, I reckon all good schemes aren't made up North." Stephen skipped a stone out over the bank. "This old island hasn't had so much excitement in a hundred years! Think of two search-parties hunting for its treasure!"

VIII

TOM WORKS OUT A NEW IDEA

MR. BLOSSOM'S colored man, Joe, was sitting on a bench in front of his cabin opening oysters, and Tom was sitting opposite him, throwing an old rubber ball for the dogs to chase. A couple of pickaninnies were playing with a puppy that every once in a while sent them rolling over with a push of its paw. The pigs, for once caught in their own picketed yard, were grunting and rooting about.

Joe was telling Tom how he had been born and brought up at Beaufort, and how he had worked in the cotton-fields on the islands till Mr. Blossom had picked him out to take care of his place.

"There ain't much money in cotton," he declared. "Sometimes we get too much sun; sometimes too much rain; then along comes a storm and washes up over the farms and spoils all the cotton. I've seen this here country look just like a lake, with only the highest bits of ground sticking up here and there; and the sea keeps making in all the time. There's places north of here where it's nibbled away at the land and swallowed it up; there's reefs out there that used to be islands once."

"I think I've seen pictures of the coast where there was good land, and now it's sea-flats," said Tom.

"Sure you have," agreed Joe, chucking an oyster

shell down toward the water. "That there ocean keeps on changing the look of things all the time; it keeps the sand moving back and back."

"It might make things look very different, even in two hundred years?" asked Tom. He stood up and flung the rubber ball as far as he could, and the three dogs went scampering after it. "I'm going for a walk up the beach. Perhaps I'll find Mr. Blossom in his duck-boat."

He walked along by the tall palmettoes that never ceased to interest the boy from the North. Most trees look somewhat alike, but these that shot up straight, then burst out in great bushes of leaves, were very odd and fascinating. When he came to the woods he picked up a stick with a crooked end, and began to pull down the gray moss where he could reach it. It always seemed to him that the trees would grow much better without this parasite, although Stephen had told him that the seeds of the moss were constantly blowing through the air, and that if the branches were freed from the moss it would grow over them again in a very short time.

All the time he was thinking of a new idea that had come to him from his chat with Joe. The idea was that perhaps the ocean had changed the geography of the islands since Blackbeard's days. He came to the beach again, and saw Mr. Blossom paddling along in his small canvas-covered duck-boat.

"Hello, my bold adventurer!" cried Mr. Blossom.

som, and ran his boat to the shore. "How goes it?" stepping out and pulling the boat up after him.

"It doesn't go at all," Tom answered. "We've dug and dug, and we haven't found anything."

"That's too bad," said Mr. Blossom. "If I'd only known you were coming, I might have hidden something for you to find."

"I've been talking with Joe," went on Tom, "and he says the water keeps changing the line of the shore. Is that so?"

Mr. Blossom nodded. "There are places where it's made a lot of change," he said. "I've seen whole meadows sunk under the sea north of here."

Tom wasn't yet ready to share his new idea with Mr. Blossom. There might be nothing in it, and he wanted to consider it by himself a little longer, so he changed the subject by telling of the trick they had played on Doan and Parry, and how they had found the two men hunting the night before.

Mr. Blossom laughed. "Pretty clever of Steve!" he said. "Those two chaps will probably work harder trying to find something they don't deserve than at all the honest jobs they've ever had. It's too bad we can't set all lazy folks to hunting for pots of gold at the end of the rainbow."

"That sounds as if you didn't believe there was anything real to hunt for," Tom protested.

The big man shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, no, I think there's lots to hunt for; but I think you get

plenty of satisfaction just out of the hunting. We're getting in pretty deep now, aren't we?" he asked. "Come up through the woods, and I'll show you a small truck-patch I've just planted."

Tom stayed to dinner with Mr. Blossom. "I don't think this weather is going to hold much longer," said his host, as they came out on the porch after dinner. "The wind's been shifting 'round to the east, and those little long white clouds you see coming up from the ocean generally mean a storm. The equinoctial gale's about due. If the weather gets too rough for you in 'The Jolly Roger,' run over here and share my humble roof."

"It looks calm enough 'round here now," said Tom, looking at the islands, shining in the sun, and the water, scarcely rippled by a breeze.

"It often looks that way before a storm," said Mr. Blossom. "Some people are like that, too; calm and quiet until all of a sudden they break out in a rage. I've seen that happen down here more than once. When you see the white-caps begin to break on that long sand-bar out yonder, make your rigging snug and take in sail."

"That won't be hard to do on our ship," said Tom. "There are some good things about having a boat that's lost as much sail and wood as ours has. But I'd better be getting back, or Steve may have thought up new tricks to fool the enemy."

"A smart fellow, Stephen," said Henry Blossom,

"and a quick thinker in a pinch, I should judge."

Tom himself seemed to be doing a good deal of thinking, though perhaps not of the quick kind, as he rowed across to his own shore. Every few minutes he would rest his elbows on the oars and let the boat drift, while his gray eyes looked out to sea, as if he were pondering some important matter.

When he reached the island, he found the others lying on the soft moss under a palmetto. They sat up at sound of his boat's keel grating on the beach.

"See the kind gentleman come to rescue the two shipwrecked mariners!" exclaimed Stephen. "I hope he's brought plenty of food in his locker."

"Haven't you had any dinner?" Tom asked.

"Oh, yes," said Rodney, "but Steve's eaten all the cake and jam, and thinks we ought to go over to Beaufort for more."

"What I really wanted to go to Beaufort for was to buy something to hide in the sand for our two friends to find," said Stephen. "We went over to the little beach this morning, Tom, and when we found the men weren't there, we took a look at their diggings. You ought to have seen the place; I'll bet they dug harder there last night than we did up the stream."

Rodney chuckled. "You'd have thought they were trying to tunnel through to China," said he. "Well, what's old Mr. Wiseman thinking about?"

Tom had apparently fallen into another brown

study, unheeding what was said. He was looking hard at the mossy turf, pushing the toe of his shoe into it. "Nothing," he said; "just considering."

Later that afternoon, however, he walked up to the mouth of the stream, and took a good look at the shelving banks there. He went as far inland as the marked sapling, and resumed his study of soil and shore. The stream headed northwest and the tides reached all the way up its length. The constant ebb and flow of water had made little overhanging cliffs along the bank. He went up to the northern point of the island and studied the shoreline there. Then, still pondering some problem, he returned to the ship.

The other two had gone somewhere in the row-boat. Tom cut a branch from a tree and began to whittle it. Everyone has his own way of thinking out matters, and whittling a stick is one of the most popular ways. With the sharpened point of the stick he drew lines in the sand. He was staring at this map when Rodney and Stephen came back. "What's the matter, old scout?" demanded Stephen. "You're as thoughtful as a clam."

"And he tells about as much," put in Rodney. "What is it, Tom? Have you invented a new way of finding that red circle?"

Stephen slapped his hand on his leg. "I have it!" he cried. "I've heard they used to use witch-hazel sticks to tell them where gold was hidden in

the ground. I think they called them divining-rods; Tom's got one of those sticks, and he's going to see if it will tell him where to look. Let us know when you reach the right place."

"Sit down, you two," commanded Tom. "I've got an idea, and I'll tell you about it."

Seeing he was in earnest, they did as he told them.

"Now, I believe," said Tom, "that this island is different to-day from what it was when Blackbeard came here. I found out that the ocean's worked its way in along the shore, and covered a good deal of land that used to be high and dry. Of course, that takes a long time, and I don't suppose the water's made much advance over this beach where we're sitting, but I do think it might have made a big change in the rivers and marshes. Take the little stream where we've been hunting; the tides come in there all the time, and they wash against the bank where it bends westward. The soil's sandy and slippery. Every once in a while they have a big storm down here, and then the waves wash up over the bank, and sometimes make new channels. Maybe that stream was only a little trickle of water when Blackbeard was here. Tides and storms might have dashed up it and worn down the banks so that where there was dry ground then, there's a stream now."

"That sounds sensible," said Rodney.

"Did you work that all out yourself?" asked Stephen, looking with great admiration at his cousin.

Tom was as silent as a china mandarin. He was twisting his pet lock of hair 'round and 'round, as if to stir his thoughts.

"If the waves have done that, then the red circle marked on the northern shore of the little stream might mean a place that's under the water now."

"I see," exclaimed Stephen, very much excited. "I shouldn't wonder at all."

"You certainly have got a great head, Tom," declared Rodney. "I don't believe I'd ever have thought of that."

Tom tried to look modest; but it was clear that he felt he had made a great discovery.

"I may be wrong," said he; "but at least it's what engineers call a working theory."

"Hope it works out!" said Stephen. "Let's get supper, and then go up in the woods, and have another look at the place."

More clouds were gathering in the sky as the boys cooked supper. The air was growing colder, too, as the wind came out of the east.

"Mr. Blossom thinks we may get a storm," Tom told them. "We might move down into the cabin to-night, if the wind blows any harder."

Supper finished, they were about to start out for the woods, when the sound of a motor-boat caught their ears.

"Doan's on the job again," said Stephen. "Perhaps he suspects how we tricked him, and is looking

'round to see what we're up to. I don't believe we'd better go up there to-night. It's easier to keep an eye out for spies in the daytime."

They could see the boat some distance out on the water. It did look like a patrol that was keeping watch on their movements. With Tom's new plan in mind they were particularly anxious not to let the two men know where they were hunting, and so they agreed to postpone their new search until morning.

As the sun went down the wind rose, and the air grew very chilly.

"The old ship's a lot better to-night than our tent on the beach," said Rodney, as they carried their blankets down into the cabin. "I don't care how much it blows out here; it can't shake this good old craft!"

But, though there were no spars to creak, no sails or rigging to flap against the mast, the old boat groaned as the rising wind beat on its sides. The wind whistled in the tops of the trees and sent the waves breaking more and more loudly on the beach.

"Glad we're not out at sea to-night!" said Stephen, as he pulled his blankets up about his ears. A wave slapped loudly against the hull. "This ship's weathered many a worse storm than this," he added.

The storm rose and roared, driving bigger and bigger breakers against the little island.

IX

THE BED OF THE STREAM

THE weather was much colder by morning. The wind was still blowing from the east, and the white-caps came racing along the shore and even sent their spray dashing over the deck of the ship. One didn't have to be a weather-prophet to see that the storm was growing in power. The boys put on their warmest clothes, and ate breakfast in the shelter of the cabin.

"I think we'd better carry the shovels up to the clearing," said Tom, when they had finished. "It would be pretty hard to row the boat along the beach in the teeth of this gale."

With coats buttoned up to the chin, and hats pulled tight down on their heads, the three took their way up the shore.

"Did you ever see water look so white?" said Rodney, pointing out to the line of waves that were breaking on a reef half a mile away.

"I reckon it's the equinoctial storm," said Stephen. "We get them at Charleston every year or two, and sometimes they're terrible big storms. They blow the roofs off houses, and do a lot of damage along the water front."

"They couldn't blow this island away, anyhow," said Tom. "Listen to the wind whistling through the tops of the palmettoes!"

As they reached the northern end of the beach, they saw a great white crane rise from the marshes ahead and sail squawking off to the west. Beyond lay water that was a dull slate-gray.

"Anyhow this ought to keep Peter Doan and his friend in Beaufort," suggested Stephen. "There's some comfort in that."

"I thought I heard a motor-boat a minute ago," said Rodney. "I couldn't be sure, but something sounded like it off there." He pointed to the northwest.

"You couldn't hear a motor-boat in a wind like this," Stephen said scornfully. "It was probably the waves driving over the pebbles."

In the woods the wind was not so high, but for some little distance the waves came splashing up the stream. A bend in the river checked them, and as the boys went further inland they found the water as quiet as usual. At last they reached the clearing and dropped their shovels. Tom took the map from his pocket and studied it carefully.

"If my figuring is right," said he, "that circle must be a little to the north of the centre of the stream; that would allow for the cutting down of the bank a couple of feet."

"It's lucky the water isn't very deep here," said

Rodney. "It can't be more than a couple of feet."

"I hope it isn't cold," said Stephen.

"Why don't we shovel through that dike we made to keep the stream out of our other digging?" suggested Tom. "That'll make it much easier."

"Good idea," said Rodney, and forthwith started to shovel away at the bank they had built between their former digging and the stream.

Once, as they worked, Tom stopped and listened. He thought he had heard some noise off to the west. He looked through the trees, but saw no cause for the noise.

"I shouldn't think Doan would be prowling 'round here now," he said to Stephen.

"He wouldn't come out on a day like this," answered the other boy.

When the dike was cut away, some of the water from the stream ran over the clearing. The water was cold and soaked through the boys' woollen stockings and heavy shoes, but that was a minor matter. Wading into the stream, they began to dig at the place Tom pointed out. This was hard work, for the shovelling must be done under water, and the sand was apt to slide back almost as fast as they threw it out.

After half an hour's work they stopped to rest. They could hear the wind high up in the tree-tops. Each of the boys looked 'round the clearing, as if to make sure that no prying eyes were watching

them. When they started again, they worked harder than ever, and then Rodney's shovel struck on something hard.

"Look here!" he said. "I struck something hard, fellows! It may be only a rock." He pulled up his shovel, and drove it down again into the same place. This time there was a scraping noise, as if the shovel were rubbing against some metal. He dug again and again, and the other two stuck their shovels in at the same place.

Splashing sand and water up on the bank, they finally uncovered what looked like a flat sheet of iron, some three feet long by two feet wide. They stared at it in amazement.

"For the love of Mike!" said Rodney. "That must be the old chest!"

"I shouldn't wonder!" agreed Tom, trying to keep a note of excitement out of his voice.

Stephen made no such attempt. He pulled off his hat and flung it in the air.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Not so loud!" warned Rodney. "Some of the cranes and eagles in the woods might hear!"

"Come along, or the sand'll have sifted back again," said Tom; and the three plunged in with their shovels, digging down at the side of the piece of metal.

A few minutes' work showed that they had undoubtedly come upon an old iron box. They dug

the sand from each side till they came to the bottom of the box; then Tom reached down and tried to get his fingers under one corner.

"Whew, but it's heavy!" he muttered. "We'll have to dig away some more of the sand before we can get it out."

"What was that noise?" Stephen asked abruptly. "I thought I heard something in the woods there!"

They all listened, but there was only the whistle of the wind above their heads.

Rodney dug his shovel in and made a little trench around the bottom of the box.

"Now," he said, "let's all get our hands under it."

Throwing down their shovels, the three boys bent over and clutched at the bottom.

They pulled and pulled, but the box was heavy, and the sand did not want to let it go.

"I've got an idea," said Tom. "Let's take one of the shovels and use it as a lever." A shovel was wedged in under the chest, and all three pushed on the handle; they shoved the shovel in farther, so that it lifted the box an inch or two out of the sand.

"Now try the same thing with the others," said Stephen. In a few minutes the three shovels were under the box, and it was loosed from the shifting soil. Standing up, they looked at the rusty iron chest.

"Think of its having been there so long, and we

finding it!" exclaimed Rodney. "I wonder what's inside?"

"Pieces-of-eight!" muttered Stephen, in an awed voice. "I tell you what! Tom had a great head to think out where we'd find it!"

Rodney caught the nearer edge of the box and tried to pull it up. He was strong, and managed to tilt it so that he could press his knee against it, and hold it several inches above its bed. Tom and Stephen joined him, and together they swung the heavy metal chest up until it rested on one end.

"A heave together now!" said Stephen.

The three bent and pushed, and the box went tumbling over like a trunk.

Again they had to use their shovels to pry it up, and again they had to heave and push, but presently they had rolled it end over end out of the stream and into the cleared space that was a little higher than the water. Panting with their efforts, they stopped and stared at the treasure. The box was very rusty, and had four heavy hinges at the back of the lid, and a great lock in front. Tom gave a pull at the cover; it didn't budge.

"We'll have to have an axe to break the lock," said he.

The other two boys quickly saw that Tom was right. Not only did the lock hold, but the metal edge of the cover had been so compressed against the sides of the box that even without the lock it

would probably have been impossible to get the cover off without the aid of a stout hammer or hatchet.

"I reckon it's safe enough to leave it here for a few minutes," said Stephen.

"We don't want to take any chances," protested Rodney. "I'll stay here, while you other two go for the tools."

The precaution seemed hardly necessary, but trees and bushes grew pretty close to the clearing, and the gray moss shut out most of the light from the sky, so that it would have been possible for spies to have crept close to the place without being seen.

Wet up to their hips from their work in the stream, Tom and Stephen didn't hesitate to wade back across the brook. Then they followed the trail along the opposite bank. As they went along they realized that the sky must have been growing more and more stormy, judging from the little light that came through the woods. The wind also seemed to have increased; and when they rounded the bend in the river they were surprised at the angry waves that came slapping up against the shore.

When they came out of the woods and stood on the low cliff above the beach, they were amazed at the sight of sea and sky. The ocean was a dull lead color, with long lines of pure white where breakers were rolling over sandy bars. Great black clouds hung in the sky, giving a weird and terrifying look to the scene. The wind was blowing a gale, snapping

the boughs of trees like bow-strings; waves dashed up the beach, sending sheets of foam where they struck against the banks. Looking down to the south, the boys saw a cascade of water dashing above the ship.

"Whew!" whistled Tom. "This is a storm all right! I never saw anything look as wicked as that sea!"

"Nor I," agreed Stephen, "and I've seen some pretty fierce looking storms, too. It's just the time of year when we get our biggest blows."

Down the shore came Henry Blossom's motor-boat, tossed about by waves and wet from stem to stern by blinding spray. The owner, in yellow oil-skins, was at the wheel. He headed his boat for the mouth of the stream, and managed to bring it up to the bank where the boys stood.

"Glad I got here in time!" he shouted, for the wind was so high that he had to shout to be heard. "A little longer and I don't know whether a boat could have gotten across to the island!"

"We've found the treasure!" yelled Stephen. The boys rushed to the bank, and shouted their news at Mr. Blossom. "We found it in the river! Tom worked it out!" called Stephen.

"It's got a lock, and its cover is battered on tight!" said Tom. "We'll have to get a hatchet to get the cover off."

"Bully for you!" answered Mr. Blossom.

"That's fine work to find old Blackbeard's treasure! But we oughtn't to wait here now. It's safe where it is, and there's no knowing what this storm is going to do. I shouldn't be surprised if we had a tidal wave; I've seen them down here before."

"But we can't leave the chest," protested Stephen, "now we've just found it."

"Could we get it on board my boat?" asked Mr. Blossom.

Tom shook his head.

"Without poles or ropes, it would take a half hour's work to get it here," said he. "Come up in the woods while we show it to you."

"We oughtn't to lose any time," protested Mr. Blossom. "I don't like the looks of the sea one bit; and I'd rather get you over to my island. You might get cut off here and run out of food before the storm's ended, or the waves might come right up over all this land."

"Just take a look at it," urged Stephen.

"You get into my boat and keep it from banging against the bank," said Mr. Blossom to Tom, "and I'll take a look at the treasure-chest, and see what we'd better do with it."

Tom got into the boat and picked up the pole to fend it off from the bank. Mr. Blossom ran up through the woods with Stephen. They found Rodney trying to pry up a corner of the cover with a sharp stone.

"By George!" Mr. Blossom exclaimed, when he saw the rusty iron box. "It looks the part all right! Just the thing a pirate would have picked out to hide his gold in!" He examined the cover closely. "You're right about getting that off. It'll take some work with a hammer and chisel after you break the lock. It's safe enough here though, because no one knows about it; and even if the sea should come up over the island, it couldn't wash that box away. It's much too heavy for the waves to move it. Even if they did, the trees would keep it from being carried far. It's weathered a good many storms since it's been in the stream, and it can surely weather another now. Leave it here till the storm's over; then we'll come back and see what's inside."

"How about getting it down to your boat?" suggested Stephen, still a little uneasy about abandoning the treasure, now it was found.

Mr. Blossom tugged at the box.

"Too heavy," he said. "It would take half a day to get that down to the shore. We'd have to get some poles and roll it over and over. There's a couple of good stout oaks," he added, pointing to the edge of the clearing; "we might be able to roll it over there and wedge it between those trees; that would hold it fast all right."

Quickly cutting three strong saplings, they managed to roll and push the chest over to the trees and get it in between them.

"That's the best we can do now," Mr. Blossom declared, "and I don't want to run the risk of waiting here a minute longer."

The three ran down-stream to the motor-boat. If anything, the storm seemed to have increased.

"Could we run along to the ship, and get what's there?" asked Stephen.

Mr. Blossom shook his head. "I wouldn't want to risk it," said he. "We'd have to run side-on to the wind, and it would be a mighty bad place to land. Never mind what you've got there; I can fit you out at my place. Jump in quick!" He took his place at the wheel; the boys followed into the boat; and the motor backed them down-stream into the curling breakers.

It was an exciting moment when the skipper swung the boat's bow 'round and out to sea. They might have been swamped then and there had not Mr. Blossom been a very expert helmsman. As it was, they just made it, and the bow headed straight into the foaming breakers. Splashing and dipping like a cockle-shell, the motor-boat rode through the surf. It headed to the north. By skilful navigating the skipper brought it beyond the point of the island. The boys, looking out at the sea, saw swells in the distance that looked almost as high as hills.

Swinging now this way, now that, yet held to a fairly straight course by Mr. Blossom's clever hand, the boat made its way to his island. To the lee of

his point of land there was a stretch of somewhat quieter water, though even here the swells were fairly high. Joe was down on the dock, and caught the boat's bow with a boat-hook. Captain and passengers climbed out.

"You'll have to lash it fast, Joe," directed Mr. Blossom. "I don't want it to go smash against the shore."

The four headed up to the house. The scene from the porch was wonderful. Clouds and ocean were now a marvelous grayish-white. The hills of water looked so high that it seemed as if they must swallow up any land they touched.

"It's going to be hard for the cotton crop, I'm afraid," said Mr. Blossom, "and for the farms, too! A storm like that will wash many shanties away." He looked at the boys. "Why, you're shivering! I don't wonder; it is getting mighty cold, and you're all soaking wet."

For the first time the three adventurers noticed that every stitch of clothing they had on was soaked through.

"Come inside while I get you dry things, and some oilskin suits. You're going to need them, for unless I'm much mistaken there'll be plenty of work for us to do in our boat before this gale's over."

They were glad to get inside, to stand in front of the roaring wood-fire and dry out, to get into warm clothes and tarpaulins.

As they stood in front of the blaze, Joe and his wife and youngsters came running into the house.

“Mighty big waves comin', Marse Henry!” said Joe.

Mr. Blossom glanced through the window. “A tidal wave somewhere up the coast!” he muttered. “This is the highest point 'round here. We'd better get the dogs and all the live-stock up here as quickly as we can!”

They went to work with a will, getting all the animals into a place of safety. They were none too soon, for scarcely had the last dog been pulled into the house than a great swell of water came flooding over the beach and lower shore, sweeping away fences and bushes in its mighty course.

X

THE GREAT STORM

FOR some time Henry Blossom's house resembled Noah's Ark in more ways than one. Not only were all the people on his island gathered in his cottage, but so were the dogs, pigs, chickens, and the goat that Joe had had great difficulty in persuading to come aboard. In a short time the house was in the midst of swirling water. The tidal wave had swept right up to the porch, demolishing fences, taking the roof off Joe's small cabin, and littering the island with wreckage. For a few minutes it seemed a question whether Mr. Blossom's house itself might not be swept away, so great was the force of the flood, and so high the water's climb. But the house was strongly built, and kept its foothold. All around it, however, was a waste of water, as far as eye could see.

For half an hour the storm beat in fury at this solitary outpost; timbers creaked and strained at their fastenings; then the gale seemed to lessen a little. The sky grew much lighter, and the heights of water flattened out. Presently Mr. Blossom, the three boys, and Joe ventured out on the front porch. The beach was under water, and so was the front lawn. Luckily, the boats that had been moored at the dock were still afloat.

"That was a real storm!" declared Mr. Blossom, looking around at what had been his island, but was now chiefly ocean. "I'm afraid things have gone badly with some of the Sea-Islanders."

"There's some of our island left," put in Tom, pointing to where the trees stood up out of the flood on the distant strip of land.

"Yes, and there are the other islands," agreed Mr. Blossom, looking to the south; "but what's become of the little farms on the lowlands?"

Joe gave a grunt. "I reckon most of the folks saw what was coming, and got up on the high ground," he said. "Cotton crop may be done for, but I reckon the niggers are safe."

"I hope so," said Mr. Blossom. "When the waves go down, we'll put out in a boat and see."

They all went into the living-room, where Joe's wife supplied them with hot coffee and sandwiches. The wind was dropping fast, and before long the temptation to explore grew irresistible. The water had lowered somewhat, and Mr. Blossom decided he might safely venture down to the boats. He had on high rubber boots, and in these he waded over his lawn to the wharf, now several feet under water, and began baling out the motor-boat with a bucket brought from the house.

Half an hour later he brought the boat up to the front porch, and the boys, now clad in tarpaulins, climbed in beside him.

“See if you can get hold of any of the other boats, Joe,” said Mr. Blossom, “while we go out and see what’s happened.”

Over the water they went, just as the coming of night darkened the sky. There was sufficient light, however, for them to see some of the results of the tidal wave. The bridge that joined Mr. Blossom’s island and the next one had been blown to pieces; its timbers hung swaying in the middle of the stream; trees had been uprooted, and were tossing on the water, or were jammed against the trunks of those still standing.

There was a considerable part of St. Helena Island that stood above the flood, and on these hill-tops the boys could make out a number of people.

“They’re all right for the time being,” said Mr. Blossom. “There’ll be plenty of boats putting out from Beaufort to carry them to the mainland. What I want to do is to see if I can pick up any castaways.” He sent the boat threading its way between the islands, while all four kept a sharp lookout for floating timbers. It was growing dark fast, and every few minutes one or other of the boys would call out “Ship a-hoy!” to let any one know that they were near at hand.

When they came to the south of the islands they turned toward the mainland, and had not gone far when Rodney’s hail was answered by a voice a short way ahead of them.

"Over here!" called the voice, which seemed to come from the water. The motor-boat moved more slowly, while its crew looked for the voice's owner. Soon they saw him, a young colored fellow on what looked to be a small raft, bobbing up and down in the water.

The motor-boat touched the raft, and Stephen and Rodney helped the passenger aboard their craft.

"I had a stick and was tryin' to steer for St. Helena," the new arrival said, "but I'se mighty glad you-all come along! That water's awful cold, and that 'ere raft don't steer very well." He gave a chuckle, and pointed toward the disappearing raft. "That's the roof of my house," he explained. "All the fam'ly got up to the high ground in good time, but I stayed to fetch the chickens. The cabin was blown to splinters, but the roof done make a raft. I reckon them chickens is a swimmin', for sure!"

"Any of your neighbors in trouble?" asked Mr. Blossom.

"I reckon they all got out in time," said the colored youth. "We-all knows what that kind of hurricane means. I reckon I was jest about the only foolish one."

With the rescued man on board, the boat chugged on in the direction of Beaufort. It was now quite dark, and very hard to distinguish objects on the water. Every few minutes Mr. Blossom would blow his motor-whistle, so that if there was any one

within ear-shot that might need help he could call to him. No one did call, however, and as they found no other people afloat in boats or on rafts, they pulled up to the dock at Beaufort, fastened their boat and went ashore.

The town had suffered considerably from the storm, though not nearly so much as had the islands. Water stood up to the street level; boats and landing-stage had been battered and wrecked; trees and bushes had been blown down, and some of the shanties had been unroofed. There were a good many people on the water-front eager to know what had happened to the islands. Boats had already been sent out, and some of these having returned had reported that the islanders were safe on the high ground. A few islanders had been brought back to Beaufort, but most of them preferred to stay where they could be near their flooded farms. Rescue boats had taken out food and blankets, and now that the storm was rapidly subsiding there seemed little possibility of further suffering for the homeless people.

Presently Tom saw Colonel Whitney and ran up to him.

"I hope your house is all right, sir," said Tom. "I guess you were far enough back to escape the big wave."

"It didn't do us much harm," said the Colonel, "except to blow the limbs off a couple of magnolias. I was wondering how you boys were faring. Your

island must have been right in the line of the storm."

"It was," said Tom, "but Mr. Blossom got us away in good time. We were in his house when the wave came. That's pretty firm, you know, but it looked as if the water might toss it up any minute."

"One of my neighbors is very much worried," said the Colonel. "Her son and daughter, with three others, started in some row-boats this morning to go up along the shore, and have a picnic party. They knew the weather wasn't very steady, but they said they'd keep close to shore and head for land at the first gust of wind. They haven't come back yet, and their parents are right worried."

"Which way did they go?" Tom asked. Colonel Whitney pointed northward.

"We might run along the shore in Mr. Blossom's boat, and see if we can find them," Tom suggested. "There doesn't seem to be anything else to be done around here."

Mr. Blossom agreed, and leaving the colored youth to be carried out to his home island in a boat that was just embarking, the three boys and Mr. Blossom set out along the shore to the north. The water was quieter now, the head-light showed for some distance, and the motor-whistle could be heard a long way. They threaded their path between the mainland and the little islands, stopping every now and then to blow the whistle and listen for an answer.

They had gone several miles north when a voice

came from a small island to the east. "Ship a-hoy!" cried the boys. Turning the bow in that direction the boat was soon grating on a sandy beach. Lifting the head-light from its socket in the bow, Tom swept the shore with it. The light revealed two girls and three boys standing in a row like so many shipwrecked mariners, waving caps and handkerchiefs.

It was the picnic party, who had taken refuge here when the storm broke. Their own boat had swamped in the gale and been swept away, and they had thought to spend the night on the island. Five passengers was crowding the capacity of the motor-boat, but they all managed to get on board, and were soon on their way back to Beaufort. Other boats there were busy on other rescue errands, but by ten o'clock there was little more to be done along the water-front.

The four went back to Mr. Blossom's cottage, which they found standing up like a light-house above the waste of waters. The boys took possession of the attic.

"I'm glad we're here, and not out on the ship to-night," said Rodney, pulling off his wet and sticky oilskins.

"You bet!" agreed Stephen.

"By Jove," said Tom, "you know I'd almost forgotten about our finding the chest, so much has been happening to-day! Well, I don't see how the waves could have done anything to it."

"They couldn't," Rodney stated positively. "We'll find it where we left it, stuck tight in among those trees."

The view from their window next morning showed the water as calm as it had been on their first arrival at the islands. Only the beaches on Mr. Blossom's island were now under water. Most of the fences and small buildings had been washed away, and Joe's cabin looked a good deal like a lobster-trap that had been hauled out of the sea. A fairly warm sun was drying things up quickly, and it was clear that within a week Mr. Blossom's little settlement could be made about as good as ever. Some of the smaller trees had been up-rooted, branches had been torn from the larger ones, and both the vegetable and the flower garden had been under water so long as to make their crops extremely doubtful.

The colored man and his wife seemed only too delighted to find that matters were no worse, and by the time the boys had finished breakfast they saw Joe and Mrs. Joe clearing away the litter of broken timbers and boughs from before their house, while the pickaninnies played on Mr. Blossom's porch.

"One more trip through the islands to Beaufort," announced Henry Blossom, as he and his three guests came out from his dining-room, "just to make sure our neighbors are all right. Now, if the owners of those little shacks and corn-fields over on St. Helena were city people, they'd raise an awful rumpus be-

cause of what the storm's done. But these people won't. They'll pick up the scraps and do what they can with them, and if their cotton crops are spoiled, they'll have to live on oysters and anything they can scrape up for the time being."

So the boys found the case to be. They made a tour of St. Helena Island, and there they found general thanksgiving that the storm had been no worse. There was a strong religious sense among these people, which led them to feel that they must take the blowing away of their houses and the soaking of their crops with the same humility with which they took sunshine and warmth. The people were all there, having spent the night safely in the houses on the higher ground, but cabins and cotton-fields were ruined in many places, and it looked as if most of the year's work had gone for naught.

The boat carried messages from one group to another. Apparently no other aid was needed, and when it had completed the circuit of St. Helena and Ladies' Islands, it made for Beaufort. Here the signs of damage were much less that morning. There was more show of activity in the little port than usual, but beyond wreckage along the water-front, there was small evidence of injury to any of the houses.

Mr. Blossom had to make purchases at some of the stores, and dinner-time found them still in town. They took that meal at the hotel, and then returned

to the harbor. As they came down to the wharf an amusing sight met their eyes. A big man was holding forth to their old friend Peter Doan, while his comrade Sam Parry was baling water out of Doan's motor-boat.

"It's a wonder to me you ain't prowling 'round them islands seeing what you can pick up," the big man was saying. "Never knew you to miss a chance to get your fingers on other people's things. Ain't there plenty of doors and shutters floating around the bay for you to fetch in here and use for firewood? I reckon that stuttering old Sea Sarpint must leak pretty bad, or you'd be out in it looking for what you could find." He jerked his thumb in the direction of Doan's boat. "Leaking pretty bad, is she?"

"Sea Serpent just suits her," Stephen whispered, nudging Tom. "That boat's got a funny snake-like wriggle in the water."

Meantime, Doan was trying to look indignant at the other's charges.

"Don't you talk that way to me!" he said. "There ain't a boat in Beaufort that don't leak some after that storm. As for taking advantage of other people's troubles, I reckon my partner and I did a whole lot more to help yesterday than you ever thought of doing. We carried messages back and forth between here and Port Royal when the wires blew down."

"I'll bet they had to pay you before you'd take

any message," retorted the other. Then, seeing Mr. Blossom and the boys smiling at the scene, the speaker flushed a little.

"Howdy-do," said Mr. Blossom.

"I'm a plain-speaking person, as you know," said the man, "and I was giving this here fellow a bit of my mind. I've had dealings with him before; I 'low I know him mighty well."

"I 'low I could tell a few things about you, too," said Doan, "only I got too much respect for other people's ears to tell them here." He stalked away to the boat, where he looked at the results of Parry's baling. "She's as dry as dry," he announced with pride.

"I reckon she's good to go as far as Charleston," declared Parry.

"Well, Mr. Blossom, I wouldn't advise you or your friends to go for a ride in his old Sea Sarpint," said the other man. "He'd get you out in the bay and then you'd all have to take to baling to keep the old barge afloat."

"We don't intend to," Mr. Blossom assured him. "I've got my own boat over there."

The other man looked where he pointed.

"Now that's a right trim-looking craft," said he. "What do you call her?"

"The Wild Goose," said Mr. Blossom.

"Well, I'll back her any day in a race against Doan's old Sea Sarpint," said the other.

Doan and Parry were pretending to pay no attention to this talk. Having made their boat watertight, they went up to Doan's little house on the shore and brought down a couple of empty boxes, some rope and fishing-lines, which they put into their boat.

"It's pretty poor weather for fishing right after a storm," the big man called out to them, as they stepped in and started their engine. "But I reckon you ain't so much regular fishermen as wreckers, like those fellows what pick up other folk's things off the Florida coast. They go out to see what they can get from ships that have gone adrift in storms," he added.

"Never you mind what we're going to do," was Doan's parting shot, as he swung the bow of his boat away from the shore, and headed for the channel.

"See how she wriggles along," said Stephen. "I'm going to call her the Sea Serpent after this."

"A beautiful pair, them two," said the big man. "I wouldn't trust 'em not to steal the sign off a blind beggar." With this he walked away, shaking his head and muttering from time to time as he glanced out at the retreating boat.

Chuckling over the repartee between the two men, the boys and their friend watched "The Sea Serpent" until she was hidden by the nearest island. Then Tom turned abruptly to Mr. Blossom. "I think we ought to go out for the chest right away," he said.

"Right you are," said the man. "Let me see. We'll need some way of getting it up to our boat—ropes and a couple of good stout poles. I wonder how much it weighs."

"We'd better take a chisel and hatchet along," Rodney suggested. "It might be too heavy to get on board, but we could break it open and take the money."

"You're pretty sure there's money in it!" laughed Mr. Blossom. "We'll need poles and rope and a chisel and hatchet. I've got them all at my house. Come down to the boat. We'll get what we need, and then we'll salvage old Blackbeard's chest."

XI

HIDDEN TREASURE

MR. BLOSSOM's boat, "The Wild Goose," as its owner had christened it, stopped at Blossom's island long enough to take on board a couple of stout poles, a coil of rope, a hatchet, hammer, and coal chisel, then shot across the short stretch of open water to Black-beard's Island, rounded the point, and cruised along the beach as far south as the old ship.

The tidal wave had swept over all the island, except possibly the very highest part in the middle of the woods. As on the other islands, limbs of trees had been broken, bushes up-rooted, and wreckage cast about everywhere.

"No wonder we didn't find the chest where we first looked for it," said Tom. "A few storms like that one would be almost enough to change the course of the little stream."

"The Jolly Roger" looked as usual from the water; her stout sides had weathered many a hurricane, and there had been little left of her timbers that could be swept away by sea or storm. When the boys waded ashore from the motor-boat, however, and climbed up on to the deck, they found few traces of the camp outfit they left there. The canvas tent had blown away and was probably now far inland, roost-

ing on the top of some tall pine. Blankets and extra clothing that had been left on the deck had likewise vanished. In the cabin the store of provisions had been pretty thoroughly soaked in the water that had dashed over the sides. A few things were unharmed; tinned goods, the shovels, the hatchets, and the axe, though even these had a coating of rust.

Stephen pointed to a reddish object, wrapped about a tree on the edge of the beach.

"That looks like one of our blankets," he said. "Perhaps we could find the rest if we hunted through the woods."

"It's pretty well soaked by now," said Rodney. "Don't bother to get it; it'll stay there a little longer anyhow, and the sun and wind will dry it out as well as you could here on the deck."

"Don't bother about your bedding," said Mr. Blossom. "I've got plenty of things over at my house. I guess I can fit you all out with any clothes and blankets you need. It's too bad you didn't have some fresh eggs in the cabin; the waves would have beaten them into a fine omelet."

"Hello! Look there!" exclaimed Tom, pointing down toward the southern marshes. "That must be the row-boat you loaned us. It looks like a big turtle stretched out on its back." They saw the keel and bottom of a row-boat upside down in the marshes. That gave them a good idea of the force of the storm.

They took the better part of an hour to investigate

the ship and its surroundings before they got aboard "The Wild Goose" again. Then Henry Blossom swung his craft about, heading up shore. The water was very smooth now. Sea-gulls were dipping down to the blue surface, searching for fish, and then rising and flapping gracefully away. Not very far to the north they heard the chug of another boat, the noise being brought clearly to them through the still air, though the boat itself was only a speck in the distance.

At the entrance to the stream they turned in. The water here was much higher than it had been before, due to the recent storm.

"I think we can take the boat all the way up to the clearing," said Tom. "She doesn't draw much, and it would be a lot easier if we could lift the chest on board, instead of rolling it down to the boat."

"I don't mind," agreed Henry Blossom. "We can pole her off if the boat runs aground."

The high water went all the way up stream. They made the bend and drew near to the clearing.

"Why, it's almost a lake!" exclaimed Stephen, pointing ahead to the place where they had dug the soil away. "It's flooded over Rodney's dike, and made a great big pool."

This was just what had happened. The flood had swept out of the river's course, and flowed through the diggings, so that now the clearing looked very different from what it had before the storm. But there was no doubt of the place; the boys knew the

trees there far too well to be deceived. They also knew exactly where they had left the chest, wedged between two of the trees.

“The water must be over the top of the chest!” Rodney exclaimed, pointing to the place where they had left it.

“It surely must be,” agreed Mr. Blossom. “I wonder if I’d better take the boat over there.” He made an attempt and found there was depth enough, so he steered to the spot where they had rolled the chest, stopped his engine, and twisted the painter around one of the trees so as to hold the boat still. The boys were looking over at the space between the trees, now three feet under water.

“Great guns!” exclaimed Stephen. “What’s become of it?”

Henry Blossom looked over the boat’s side; he looked at the trees, and then around them in order to make sure that they had the right place. There was no doubt, however, that this was the spot where they had rolled the chest and wedged it between the trees. Then he looked down again at the ground under the water. There was no denying the fact that the chest was no longer there. For some minutes all four stared at the place, as if in a trance; then they looked around at the neighboring part of the clearing, at the bushes along its edge, even up into the trees, as though they thought the chest might have taken wings and lodged in the branches.

"Well, of all things!" muttered Tom. "That chest must have weighed a whole lot, and I don't see how the storm could possibly have swept it out of this place!"

"It couldn't," said Rodney, very positively. "The trees and bushes are so thick it couldn't have gotten through them."

"It must have weighed an awful lot!" said Stephen. "The water couldn't have flung it about."

"No, siree," agreed Mr. Blossom. "It would have taken more than that tidal wave to pick up a chest as heavy as that and float it off through the woods."

"Where in thunder can it be then?" Rodney demanded. "It certainly was here just two days ago."

"I'll swear to that," agreed Mr. Blossom.

Stephen stripped off his clothes, jumped over the side of the boat, and waded around where the chest had been.

"I think I can feel the place where it stuck on the bottom," he said. He waded all over the little lake, but there wasn't a stick or stone that gave the slightest clue to what had become of the treasure.

The hunters sat in the boat looking as bewildered and mystified as people could look. They had thought to fasten ropes around the old chest, haul it up on board, take it down to the beach, break it open with the hatchet and chisel, and find out what Blackbeard

had hidden in it. Instead, the place was as empty of any chest as if they had never found one in the bed of the stream, and rolled it there. Stephen climbed on board and put on his clothes.

"I wish we'd stayed out here, storm or no storm," he declared. "We oughtn't to have left that old chest for a minute."

"You couldn't have stayed," said Mr. Blossom. "There's no knowing what the storm might have done to you."

Tom had taken to twisting his hair in his fingers. "The chest didn't fly away, and we don't see how the storm could have swept it away. How did it get away then?"

"If you ask me," said Rodney, "I'd say it must have been helped."

"Who helped it?" Tom asked, still looking intently at the distant trees, as if he were questioning them.

Now one name instinctively occurred to all the party.

"I don't see how he could ever have found it," said Stephen.

"Nor I. He couldn't have gotten it away during the storm," put in Rodney.

Mr. Blossom only shook his head and said nothing.

"If he did take it," declared Tom, sitting up straight suddenly, "we're only wasting time chatter-

ing here. We might as well admit he's beaten us to-day."

"But it doesn't belong to him," said Henry Blossom. "In the first place this island's mine, and anything that's found on it really belongs to me; in the second place you boys found it, and only left it here until you could come and get it. He hasn't any more right to it than if he came up into my house and stole one of my rifles. He's just a plain ordinary thief."

"Of course we don't really know who took it," argued Tom.

"Well, who else could?" said Stephen. "I bet you if we find Peter Doan, we'll find the chest."

To make absolutely certain they took one more thorough look around, but there was no possible doubt that the chest was gone; so Mr. Blossom started his engine again, and carefully backed the boat down the stream. Out on the ocean they held a short conference.

"We don't mean to let him get away with it," said Tom. "I'm sure I don't, for one."

"And I'm sure I don't," said Stephen.

"Nor I," agreed Rodney.

"Then," said Mr. Blossom, "I guess the thing for us to do is to chase those two pirates. Parry must have helped him. He couldn't possibly have managed that chest by himself. The question is, where did he go?"

It was an easy question to ask, but a very hard

one to answer. The ocean stretched away to the east, the islands and the mainland on the other side. The two men might have gone in any direction, and might have hidden their treasure in any place they chose.

"I don't suppose he made back for Beaufort," said Stephen, "but there's a chance that he might have. Perhaps we'd better begin to hunt there."

Tom looked out across the water. There was no sign of a boat anywhere about; there was no sound of a motor to be heard.

"Do you mind taking us to Beaufort, Mr. Blossom?" he asked.

"Do I mind!" echoed Mr Blossom. "I'm just as much in this chase now as any of you three; we'll work it out together. To Beaufort it is." He headed the boat north, then west, and let her have all the power she could stand.

The trip to town was made in record time. The water-front was practically deserted as "The Wild Goose" slowed up at the wharf. Commander and crew tumbled out and headed up to the main street. They made for the little cottage that had been pointed out to them as the home of Peter Doan. The front door was locked. They pounded on it, but got no answer. They tried the windows, but found they were all fastened on the inside. A small door at the back bore a padlock. It was very plain that the owner wasn't at home.

"I wonder where Parry lives," said Stephen. Stopping a negro, who was driving an old phaeton along, he asked where Sam Parry could be found.

The negro scratched his head and looked doubtful. "I don't 'xactly know where he lives," he answered vaguely. "'Pears to me he don't have no reg'lar home; jest visits 'round with his friends. You might ask for him up to the store."

They inquired for Parry at the store, but without success. "He's probably up to some mischief," the store-keeper volunteered. "He has a room over the hardware shop down at the corner."

He wasn't in his room at the hardware shop. No one there knew where he was. Time was passing, and it was evident that they were not apt to find any trace of Doan or Parry in Beaufort. Doan's boat was gone, and the owner had vanished with it.

"Well," said Tom, "we seem to be up against it. They might have gotten almost anywhere by this time." His tone sounded discouraged.

"We'll go back to my house," said Mr. Blossom. "There's no telling where we might pick up a clue."

Back to Henry Blossom's island they went, and up to the house. The sun had set, and Joe's wife was setting the supper table.

"I didn't know when you-all would be coming in," she said, "but I knew you-all would be mighty hungry when you did come, so I thought I'd better be ready for you."

"Bring on the food," said Mr. Blossom, "and when you get a chance, ask Joe to step in here a minute."

In the midst of supper Joe arrived. Mr. Blossom asked if he had seen anything that looked like Doan's motor-boat that afternoon. Joe nodded.

"I seen it coming from there-along," he said, pointing out the window in the direction of Black-beard's island. "I was down on the beach baling out one of the duck-boats, when I seen it come cruising up along here, heading north; that must have been about four o'clock, Mr. Blossom."

"You're sure it was Peter Doan's boat?" Henry Blossom asked.

"Yes, sir; I surely know that old rattle-trap of his'n."

"We got to Beaufort about five o'clock," said Mr. Blossom, "and we left the island about quarter to five, so they must have left about three-quarters of an hour before we did."

"While we were up on the ship most likely," said Rodney.

"And they're going north," said Mr. Blossom. "Well, it's a good long run to Charleston, and I don't think they'll make very good time in that old boat. Have you had enough to eat? If so, we'll make a start after them." The three boys answered at once in the affirmative.

Mr. Blossom gave rapid orders. Joe's wife was

to put some bread, a cold ham, some tinned things, and a bottle of drinking water into a basket and take it to the motor-boat. Joe was to strap one of the small canvas duck-boats on to the deck of "The Wild Goose." Blankets and sweaters were stored away in the forward compartment. "I think we've everything we need for a short voyage," said the owner.

The sun had set, the night was clear, and the sea calm. As the crew of "The Wild Goose" left the dock, all felt a fine thrill of adventure. If the treasure-chest had slipped through their fingers, they were at least going hot-foot after it. This was the sort of a chase that the pirate himself must often have taken when he ranged the seas.

"Keep a sharp look-out ahead," the skipper ordered. "I know the coast pretty well, but four pairs of eyes are a good deal better than one."

North, and somewhat east, they dashed, for the coast ran in a zigzag line, with little islands dotting it here and there. Reefs were well marked, and the captain was able to keep his boat at full speed. The afterglow died out of the sky. The stars grew brighter, the night wind rose, and blew up small waves. Rodney was up in the bow, keeping a sharp look-out ahead; Stephen and Tom, in the stern, followed the line of the shore for anything that might look like another boat.

"I've a notion they'll keep fairly near to shore," said Henry Blossom. "That boat of Doan's leaks,

and I don't believe the storm did much good to its engine; besides they might want to run in and land when they come to a settlement. I think we'd better keep pretty close inshore."

The shore was mostly wooded down to the water's edge; occasional little beaches broke the stretch of trees. Small cabins stood out here and there, but the only boats to be seen were a few old row-boats pulled up on the sand.

"We're making good time," said Mr. Blossom, glancing at his watch. "That point's a good ten miles from Beaufort. I don't suppose they had any food on board, so they might stop and beg some at a farm-house."

"I wouldn't trust them to stop," said Tom, "if they've got the chest on board."

"Nor I," said Stephen. "They might run all night without getting hungry."

Now their course was almost due north and it was nearly ten o'clock before they sighted a couple of small houses that stood in a clearing just above the beach. There was a little cove here, and the starlight showed several boats at anchor.

"We'd better take a look here," said the skipper.

"The Wild Goose" headed in near enough to have a look at the boats. Then Rodney called out, "I think I see Doan's boat; that one to the right—to the right of that big tree! Doesn't that look like 'The Sea Serpent'?"

"It does," agreed Tom, staring hard at the boat.

"The Wild Goose" swung inland, and slowed down just off the cove.

"You're right; it's Doan's boat," declared Mr. Blossom, "or if it isn't, it must be its twin brother."

They ran gently up to the little floating stage, stopped the engine, fastened the boat, and landed. The sound of voices brought the inhabitants of the nearest house to the shore—a big, bearded man, a tall, gaunt woman, a girl, and a red-headed boy.

"Evening," called the man.

"Good evening," answered Mr. Blossom, and walked up to the family of four, the boys following.

The man and woman and the two children stared at the strangers as though they saw few people.

"My name's Henry Blossom, and I live down near Beaufort. We're looking for some friends, who came up this way in a motor-boat." Mr. Blossom pointed to the one in the cove. "I think that's their boat. Our friends are two men. Could you tell us which way they've gone?"

The man continued to stare for a few minutes. "That boat," he said presently, nodding at the one Mr. Blossom indicated, "came in here about an hour ago. It had sprung a leak, and was nigh half-full of water. The two men who was in it asked me to take care of it for them, and hired a sail-boat of me. They wanted to get up along north, they said." He squinted at the sky. "I don't reckon they'd git

very far in this wind. The sail-boat ain't very fast, and they took a big box out of that there boat, and put it in the other."

"A big box?" echoed Mr. Blossom.

"Yes, a big black box," said the man, "but they didn't say what was in it."

"Well, I'm glad we know where they are," said Mr. Blossom in a cheery voice. "We don't want to lose track of them, if we can possibly help it." He too considered the wind. "I don't believe they'd get far on this tack," said he. "Wind's dying down again. If you've no objections, we'd like to camp out on your point."

Mr. Blossom's manner was so pleasant that it would have been hard for anyone to refuse him a request. In this particular case any one was free to camp out on the point. Moreover, the fisherman and his family saw so few strangers that the arrival of these four was quite an event. The big man nodded. "Sure you can camp out. My name's John Calkins. This is my wife 'Lidy, and them children's my son and darter."

"We might give you a shake-down in the house," said Mrs. Calkins, hospitably.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Mr. Blossom. "We'll sleep out under the stars. We've got enough blankets in our boat, and I'm sure we'll do very well. My friends are Tom and Rodney Mason, and Stephen Sims. Nice place you've got here, Mr. Calkins."

"Yes, it's pretty nice," agreed the other man, "but the storm didn't help its looks any. 'The fishin' ain't been any too good lately. I'll help you unload your stuff." Calkins and his son went down to the shore with the others, while Mrs. Calkins and her daughter withdrew to the house.

They unloaded the sweaters and blankets, made the boat safe for the night, and chose a camping-place on a point under some pines. Looking north Tom saw a small island.

"Do you suppose your sail-boat could have got farther than that by this time?" he asked the Calkins boy.

The latter grinned and shook his head. "I don't reckon she could," he answered.

The fisherman and his son returned to their cottage, and the four adventurers spread their blankets for the night.

"We know they can't be very far away," said Mr. Blossom, "and if they've made a landing on shore, they couldn't carry that heavy box very far. I think they're safe till morning."

"Well, we know who's got the chest anyhow," said Stephen. "That's some comfort."

"And we ought to catch sight of it again tomorrow," put in Rodney.

"I shouldn't wonder if they'd be becalmed before morning," said Mr. Blossom. "That's where our boat will have a big advantage over them."

XII

CALKINS' COVE

THE arrival of "The Wild Goose" was undoubtedly an event of great interest to the family of John Calkins. Henry Blossom and the three boys had hardly finished their early morning swim before the red-headed son of the fisherman joined them at their simple camp. He was more talkative now than he had been the night before.

"That there boat the two men left's plum full of water this morning," he stated. "I reckon it's sprung a pretty big leak. I wouldn't want to go out to sea in it; no, sir, I'd rather have our old sail-boat any day."

Rodney was trying to make his wet hair lie down, patting it with his hand. "I suppose you know all about sailing a boat?" he asked the Calkins boy.

"Well," said the other, sticking his hands into his trousers pockets, and throwing his head back with a confident air, "I reckon I could sail a boat in most any kind of weather, 'cept a calm like it is now."

"You don't think the sail-boat can have gone far then?" Rodney asked.

"Not without more wind than this," was the answer. "I don't reckon them two men will want to take to the oars. It's a mighty heavy boat, and oars won't make it go fast."

"What's your name?" asked Rodney.

"Pete," said the boy. "I go to school for three months every winter, and the rest of the time I fish and work around this here place. I'd like to get to be an engineer on a railroad." He looked anxiously at Rodney, whom he seemed to regard as a person of considerable intelligence, although they were about the same age. "Do you think I ever could be?"

"Sure," said Rodney. "You don't have to be so mighty wise to be an engineer. Sit down and have breakfast with us."

Peter Calkins had already had one breakfast, but he accepted the invitation and shared the simple provisions the boys produced from the locker of "The Wild Goose." He had gotten over any shyness he might have felt in the presence of strangers. His good-natured freckled face and light blue eyes showed the keenest interest in everything the others said. He never missed a joke, and would slap his leg as he laughed, evidently in imitation of his father.

By the time they had finished breakfast the fisherman and his daughter joined them. The girl, who wore a faded blue calico dress, was a couple of years older than her brother. At first she was as shy as he had been, but Mr. Blossom soon made her feel quite at home by telling her how he had gathered the chickens and pigs and pickaninnies into his house during the storm. He told a funny story very well, and by the time he had done the girl was sitting on

the ground with the rest of them, laughing almost as loudly as her brother Peter.

"We've got the pigs, and the chickens," said Mr. Calkins, "but we ain't got the pickaninnies, unless you call Eliza-Jane and Pete pickaninnies."

"Don't you dare!" said Eliza-Jane, and she shook her fist at her father, so that he pretended to be very much afraid and started to run away.

"Now," said Mr. Blossom, "to business. What do you propose, Tom?"

Tom took a quick glance at the fisherman and his two children. They were much too friendly and innocent-looking for him to suspect them of being confederates of Doan.

"I suppose we want to catch up with our two friends," said he. "I think we ought to start out in 'The Wild Goose,' and try to find the sail-boat."

"How can you tell it when you see it?" Stephen asked.

"I can point it out to you," put in Peter.

"I think we'd better take Peter along with us," decided Mr. Blossom. "He knows the sail-boat, and also the reefs and rocks around here."

It was clear that Peter was much delighted at the prospect. He danced all the way down to "The Wild Goose," and pulled the motor-boat close up to the float. John Calkins and his daughter watched the others embark, the girl looking a little envious at her brother's good luck.

"It's too bad we can't take you out with us, Eliza-Jane," said Mr. Blossom. "We'll call again later, and give you a real joy-ride."

The object of the pursuers was evidently to try to catch up with Doan and Parry without the latter knowing of their presence. The wind had been so light ever since the previous evening that the two men certainly couldn't have gone far in the sail-boat. As "The Wild Goose" might overtake them at any time, Mr. Blossom ran his boat as quietly as he could, stealing along the shore where the boat would not make so visible a mark against the trees and beach. There was a risk that the fisherman's boy might hail the sail-boat as soon as he saw it, so Mr. Blossom told him that they were anxious to come upon the two men unawares. "We want to surprise them," he said, "and if we could, we'd like to get that big box your father spoke about away from them without their knowing it."

"They'd sail outside of Cow Island," said Peter, "if they was trying to make time up-shore." He pointed to a pine-covered stretch of land that lay about a hundred yards off the coast.

"The Wild Goose" turned to the east, and stole very quietly toward Cow Island. Around the southern end it turned and made its way north. The morning was very warm, and there was hardly a ripple on the water.

"Mighty poor day for sailing," said Peter. He

stood up and looked ahead. "I think that's our boat in that little harbor," said he. "I didn't think they'd get much farther than that."

Now they saw the white sail of a small boat where the boy pointed. If he was right in his guess, they must be very careful or the men would hear them. "The Wild Goose" was run fairly close to land. The crew slipped over the side into a couple of feet of water and carried the rope to the shore, where it was fastened securely around a tree. Very cautiously the party of five crept along through the bushes that grew down to the water's edge. As they got nearer the tiny harbor they lay flat and pushed themselves along like Indians hunting buffalo. Soon they could see the shore close to the boat. No men were in sight. There was only the sail-boat, its canvas barely stirring in the faintest breeze, and tiny waves rippling against its sides.

"It looks deserted as our 'Jolly Roger,'" Stephen whispered. "But they may be lying in the bottom of the boat; they must be somewhere on the island."

For a full fifteen minutes the four boys and Henry Blossom lay in the bushes, watching the sail-boat and the shore near it. There was no sign of the men. The only sound was the lapping of the water. Then Stephen made a suggestion. "Why not let Peter go up to the boat?" he whispered. "If the two men are hiding he can say that his father brought

him over here in one of his boats ; they won't suspect him of knowing anything about us."

"Great head!" muttered Tom. He looked at Mr. Blossom, who nodded.

"So I'm not to let on that I've seen you?" asked Peter.

"No; you just pretend you came over here to dig oysters, or anything else you can think of; and pretend to be very much surprised if you see the men. But not a word about us." This was Stephen's whispered counsel.

"And if you do find them, make them stand up so we can catch a glimpse of them; and we'll steer back to 'The Wild Goose' without their seeing us," whispered Tom.

The fisherman's son stood up and advanced along the shore toward the sail-boat. He whistled as he went, so as to give the men notice of his coming. Those in hiding watched intently as Peter crossed the little beach and went up to the boat.

The sail-boat was in a couple of feet of water a small anchor and rope holding her to the beach. Peter waded out as if he were quite as much accustomed to having his shoes and stockings wet as dry, and laid his hands on the sail-boat's gunwale and pulled himself on board. The searching party saw him stand up and wave his hands to them. Then he beckoned to them.

"Nobody there," muttered Rodney. "Those

two pirates must be looking around for some other way to escape." The boys and the man ran quickly to the sail-boat, and splashed out into the water. It was a small boat with no cabin, and with only a covered place at the bow. Fishing tackle and a coil of rope, a small wooden box that had held soap, and a sack such as flour is put in, lay on the bottom of the sail-boat.

"Where's the chest?" demanded Rodney.

"Where the dickens can it have got to?" Stephen asked, looking all around.

"It's not in the boat, that's sure," said Tom.

"You're certain you saw the two men put a big box into your boat, are you?" Stephen asked Peter.

"You bet I did," said the other boy. "They were so clumsy about it we thought they'd swamp this here boat."

"Well, they've taken it out again, that's certain," said Henry Blossom.

Tom was pulling his hair. "I suppose when they found there wasn't enough wind for sailing, they thought they'd better put in here instead of lying out on the water becalmed. If we came after them, we wouldn't be so apt to find them here as if they were out in the sail-boat. They'd guess we'd probably go on past them, so they landed here; and then to make sure nothing should happen to the chest, they lugged it out of the boat and hid it somewhere. That's my guess."

"Sounds all right," agreed Stephen. "The question is, do we want to hunt for it now, and run the risk of their seeing us, or had we better lie low and wait for them to take the next step?"

"If they knew we were here they could do a hundred things to make sure we'd never find it," said Tom. "I think we'd better keep a watch on them. We can arrange it so they can't leave the island without our knowing it. When they do leave they'll surely take the chest with them." He happened to glance at Peter Calkins, who was listening with the greatest attention.

"Jumping Jupiter!" Tom exclaimed. "We've forgotten Peter doesn't know what we're talking about!" The others looked somewhat disturbed for a minute. Then Tom's eyes twinkled. "I guess we'd better tell him right off the bat," said he. "He'd better know what we're up to, instead of trying to guess it." That seemed wise advice, and they explained the whole situation to the fisherman's boy. His round blue eyes looked rounder than ever as he listened to their story of pirates and hidden treasure.

"Golly!" he said, when he had heard the whole tale, "but I'd like to help you get it away from those two fellows! How'd it do to steal this here sail-boat; then they'd have to stay here, or else swim ashore; and they couldn't very well swim and take that big box with them."

"No," said Tom, "what we want is to get hold of the chest, and not the men. If we took the boat, and they found we were on their track they might just leave the chest where they've hidden it, and laugh at us, and come back some time later and get it for themselves. That won't do at all. We must know where the treasure is; that's the main thing."

"Tom's right," said Rodney. "I vote we leave things just as they are here, but keep a watch on the island and spot them when they leave. It's only a stone's throw to shore, and we can camp on the bank there opposite and see whatever happens."

"Except at night," objected Stephen.

"Well," said Rodney, "they won't be apt to stay here more than one night. Surely not, if there's any wind for sailing, and we can take turns in the motor-boat at night patrolling the water 'round here."

A short time afterwards the captain and crew of "The Wild Goose" embarked again in their boat, and swung around the southern end of the island toward the mainland. Doan and Parry must have been somewhere in the woods that hid the centre of the island, unless they had swum ashore; and there would have been little reason for their doing that.

The shore of the mainland was covered with woods almost down to the water's edge, furnishing a good shield for watching whatever took place off shore. Running a little to the south, Mr. Blossom found an inlet for his boat. "The Wild Goose" was

anchored, and the searchers made their way through the trees to a point nearly opposite the island. A little hunting brought them to an open glade with a thin strip of pines between the glade and the shore. The sun came through the tree-tops, and the moss made a soft carpet. It was a pleasant place for camping, and they at once decided to make this their headquarters.

"I wonder if we could buy some milk and supplies from your father?" Mr. Blossom asked Peter.

"I'm sure you could," the boy answered. "I can show you the trail down along through the woods that'll bring you to our place in no time at all."

Tom and Rodney were left in charge of the camp, the arrangement being that one of them should keep a constant lookout on the water, and if he saw any sign of Doan and Parry leaving in the sail-boat, the other boy should run down to "The Wild Goose" and blow its motor-horn, which could be easily heard at the Calkins house, and would bring the rest of the party immediately. Stephen and Peter and Mr. Blossom then set out in quest of fresh supplies.

Mrs. Calkins and Eliza-Jane had been baking corn-bread the day before, and said they could spare a pan of that, as well as some milk, and some eggs and bacon. The girl looked disappointed at not taking part in the adventures her younger brother was having, and this led Mr. Blossom to suggest that perhaps she would like to come up in the woods

and have dinner with them. Eliza-Jane beamed at the suggestion, and accepted gladly. Mrs. Calkins said she could get along without her for that afternoon, and then, laden with their new provisions, the party went back to camp.

It was a warm, almost windless, day, and Tom reported no sign of the sail-boat. The chances were that Doan and Parry had planned to spend some time on the island, thinking that any searching party would go farther north, and they would be able to double on their tracks and get away in another direction before the searchers returned. Doubtless they had taken sufficient provisions in their boat when they started. In fact, Peter Calkins said that the men had transferred several packages from their motor-boat to his father's sail-boat.

There being no need of haste therefore, the campers decided to have a good dinner. While Stephen kept watch, Rodney cooked the meal of scrambled eggs, which he garnished with strips of fried bacon. This, and the corn-bread and milk made a good combination, and Eliza-Jane, with a smile at the warm besmudged face of Rodney, told him he made a much better cook than she did.

Dinner cleared away, they played mumblety-peg for a while, using Tom's jack-knife. Peter was the best at this game, though his sister showed the results of long and careful training at it. Then Mr. Blossom took a nap, while Rodney and Peter went down to

"The Wild Goose" to see that the boat was all right, and Eliza-Jane and Stephen sat on the bank pretending to fish with long poles, string, and bent pins, and meantime kept a watch for any sails on the water.

"Those cousins of yours are from up along north?" asked Eliza-Jane, as she cast her fishing line as if she were trying to hook a trout.

"Yes, from New York," said Stephen.

"They talk different from us, don't they?" the girl went on. "I suppose folks know an awful lot if they've lived in New York?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Stephen. "Tom and Rodney don't know much more than I do. I've visited them and been off on trips with their troop, and they're not much different up there from what we are here."

The girl leaned forward, resting her cheek on her fist.

"Gee, but I wish I was a boy, and could do some of the things you-all do! Why couldn't Peter have been a girl instead of me, or why weren't we both boys?"

This was, of course, a difficult question for Stephen to answer, yet the girl sounded so much in earnest that he felt as though he ought to say something.

"Well, you see," he began, "lots of people wish they were something else, but it doesn't follow they'd be any better off if they were. Now Tom and Rod

and I have been thinking it would be nice if we'd been pirates like old Blackbeard and Captain Kidd. But probably if we had been we wouldn't have liked it at all. We just think of them as sailing 'round and holding people up and hiding their treasures; but probably they often got mighty sick of it, and got wounded, and sometimes they were hungry, and they must always have been pretty badly frightened for fear they'd get caught. So I reckon we're just as well off as we are, after all."

Eliza-Jane shook her head slowly. "That might be so of pirates, but it wouldn't be so about boys like you and your cousins and Pete."

Stephen looked at the girl's freckled, puzzled face. "I was just coming to that," said he, in his most fatherly manner. "You see there's lots of disagreeable things a fellow has to do that a girl doesn't. For instance, he has to go to school more, and he has to"—He hesitated. "He has to"—he scratched his head, and looked out at the water. "He has to—well, I can't think of anything else just now; but he has to learn a lot more than girls do, and that's a pretty big nuisance."

"Nonsense," said Eliza-Jane, turning around and laughing at him. "A girl has to learn how to cook and sew and keep house. You can't make me agree with you about that."

"Well," admitted Stephen, "I hadn't thought very much about the matter before; but I'm sure I

could give you a pretty good argument when I'd thought it out."

"I reckon you're a pretty clever talker," said Eliza-Jane, looking admiringly at Stephen.

"Oh, no," he said, hastily, "there's lots cleverer than I. But my uncle says I ought to be a lawyer when I grow up, because I've always got something to say on every subject."

The girl looked out across the water thoughtfully, then she pointed to the little island. "Why, there are those men over there," said she. "See them down on the beach."

Stephen looked. "By Jove! It's they!" he exclaimed. "I'd know those two anywhere. Come back out of sight." He sprang up, and with very little ceremony seized Eliza-Jane by the elbows and pulled her back behind the screen of trees.

XIII

A MESSENGER TO THE ENEMY

LATE that same afternoon Eliza-Jane, Stephen, Rodney, and Mr. Blossom went down to the little harbor known to the neighbors as Calkins' Cove. Tom had stayed on guard at the camp. Peter and Stephen, on the shore, saw Mr. Calkins row in from a fishing trip. The keel of his boat grated on the sand, and he stepped out and pulled the boat up beyond the reach of the tide.

"Those two fellows over on Cow Island called out to me as I came back from fishing," said Mr. Calkins. "They said there warn't enough wind to use the sail-boat. They want to patch up their motor-boat if they can. I said I'd be going up to the store to-morrow, and I'd git 'em some of the things they wanted to stop the leak; but they want to see what they can do with the boat before then, and I said I'd git you to row it over to them, Pete."

Peter looked rather glum at this suggestion. "I'd a heap rather run the engine than row the old tub," said he.

"There, there, sonny, you don't know nothin' about an engine, and you can row," said his father. "We've got most of the water out of the boat, and she won't ship much more before you git her over to Cow Island."

"How am I to get back again?" Peter demanded. "I don't want to stay over there with those two fellows."

"That's right," said Mr. Calkins. "I hadn't thought of that; how are you to git back?"

"You might come back in the sail-boat," suggested Rodney.

"Suppose they didn't want to let me take it," argued the other boy. "They mightn't want to have only the leaky motor-boat in case they wanted to get away."

"That's right," agreed his father. "Well, it won't do you any harm to spend the night out there. I can pick you up in the morning, when I start out fishing."

"I tell you what," said Rodney, who had been thinking deeply, "if they won't let you come back in the sail-boat, you wait until it's good and dark, then you light a lantern down on the shore on the side toward our camp. We brought along a duck-boat on 'The Wild Goose,' and if I see your lantern I'll paddle over in it and bring you back with me. Have you got a lantern?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Calkins, "we've got a lantern up to the house. You boys go ahead and make your plans. You'll enjoy 'em. I'll go up to the house and fix the lantern."

As soon as Mr. Calkins was out of ear-shot, Rodney explained further. "You see if you go

over there you can find out something more about what they're doing. You might even get on the track of where they've put the chest. Then when I paddle over, you can warn me not to land too near them by guiding me by the lantern. They needn't know who's in the duck-boat; they'll just think it's some of the people who live along here paddling out on the water. If they're asleep by that time that'll give me a chance to do a little spying on my own hook."

This idea was so delightful, and so changed Peter's notion of what had been an unpleasant duty into an adventure, that the two immediately set to work to put it into execution. The leaky "Sea Serpent" was hauled closer to shore, and Peter, climbing into it, decided that he could probably row it as far as Cow Island before much water came in. By this time Mr. Calkins had returned with the lantern and a box of matches. The boys decided about the use of the lantern as a signal, and then Peter took the oars and pulled out of the cove.

When Mr. Blossom, Rodney, and Stephen got back to their camp in the woods they found that Tom had nothing to report. Eliza-Jane and Stephen had caught the only glimpse of Doan and Parry that day. Supper was soon prepared and eaten; then Rodney told the others of the scheme he had concocted with Peter Calkins, and Stephen and he went down to the place where "The Wild Goose" was lying, unfast-

ened the duck-boat from her deck, and launched it in the water. Together they paddled it around to the screen of trees by the camp.

So still were they that even Mr. Blossom and Tom, sitting on the bank, scarcely heard them come up. The chances were good that Rodney would be able to get over to the island without being seen. Discussing the matter, it seemed fairly clear that the men who had stolen the treasure preferred to keep in hiding on Cow Island rather than take to the slow sail-boat, and run the risk of being overhauled and captured on the open water. The chances were that they would try to get "The Sea Serpent" in shape to carry them and the chest farther north. That being the case, it was most desirable that the treasure-seekers should try to get the chest away from the men while they were still on the island.

The night was dark, and the island was soon only a dim line to the east of the camp. Then a light showed near its southern point.

"That's Peter's signal," said Rodney. "Now don't you people worry about me; I can take care of myself all right. I'll go over and see what I can find out, then I'll bring Peter back with me." He took his seat in the duck-boat, which would hold only two, and dipped his paddle in the water. Slowly and noiselessly the boat left the shore, and was soon almost invisible from the bank.

"That solves one problem at least," said Tom,

as he watched the duck-boat fade into the darkness. "If those pirates try to get away to-night, Rodney will be sure to see them, and he'll raise the alarm with his whistle; then we can get out 'The Wild Goose' and be after them in no time."

Rodney, meanwhile, was manœuvring his light craft across the short stretch of water with all the skill that a practiced hunter uses in stealing up on unsuspecting ducks. Before he had gone more than half-way the lantern light was extinguished, probably because Peter didn't wish to run the risk of other eyes seeing it. But Rodney knew where the lantern had been, and he brought his boat gently up to that point. It slid softly over the pebbly shore, and he stepped out and pulled it after him up the sand. There stood Peter waiting. They made sure that the boat was safe. Then Peter whispered what had happened.

"I brought them the motor-boat all right," said he, "and they worked on it until it got too dark. They told me they wouldn't let me take the sail-boat back; said I'd have to spend the night here. I let on I didn't mind that, as Dad would stop for me in the morning. I think they've got the chest hidden in the trees, pretty near the sail-boat. I caught sight of something that looked like it and started to walk in that direction, when the man with the black whiskers caught me by the arm and told me to look out or I'd walk into a bog. He said he nearly got

in up to his knees in the place I was making for. Shucks, there ain't no bog there!" Peter added scornfully.

"What are they doing now?" Rodney asked.

"They said they was mighty sleepy, and we all settled over there by the sail-boat. They made themselves beds out of boughs. I let on to go to sleep, too, but I kept rolling farther and farther away from them, and when I was sure they didn't know what I was up to, I sneaked away through the bushes, got the lantern where I'd left it back of a tree, and came over here. Gee, won't they be surprised when they don't find me in the morning? They'll surely think I must have swum ashore."

Rodney, however, wasn't much concerned as to what Parry and Doan would think of Peter's disappearance; what he wanted was to see if Peter was right in supposing that Blackbeard's chest was hidden in the woods near the sail-boat.

"You show me the way; I think we can get around there without making any noise at all," he said. "That's one thing scouts are good at."

The fisherman's boy was as skilful as Rodney in making his way through woods and underbrush without making a sound. At first it wasn't so essential that they should break no twig nor rustle any dry leaves, but as they came closer to the eastern shore, they took every precaution not to disturb the sleepers.

Peter led the way, and when he approached the beach above the sail-boat he stopped to point, and then to nod his head like one drowsy with sleep. Rodney understood.

They didn't go down to the beach, but instead circled through the trees until they came to a thicket, well protected by thorn-bushes. Parting this carefully, Peter pushed his way through. As Rodney followed he made out the lines of a big chest in the centre of the thicket. He went over to it and looked at it more closely. It was as like the one that he and the other two had pulled out of the stream as two peas in a pod. It must be the very same iron chest they had found. He gave a tug at the top by catching his hands together around one corner. The top stuck tight, just as it had when they had first found the chest.

It was a good deal to have located the box that they were all so eager to get hold of, but a strong desire came over Rodney to see what was inside it, and if there should be gold pieces to slip some of them into his pocket to take back to Tom and Stephen as a sample of what they might find when they got the box itself. He ran his fingers along the edge of the cover, but in the darkness he could not tell whether Peter Doan had yet pried up the edge so that he could pull the cover off. The lock seemed to be intact, and though he tried several times to pry up the cover, he found it would not budge. What

he needed was a chisel and a hammer or heavy stone; with that he might be able to pry the cover up.

Peter had been standing by, keeping his ears open for any noise from the beach; now Rodney caught him by the sleeve and pulled him over to the chest. Breaking a twig from the bushes, he gave an imitation of what he wanted to do to the cover by pounding the twig with his fist. Peter nodded. Then Rodney took out his jack-knife, and hunted about until he found a stout branch; this he cut and whittled to a point; then he cut a second stick like the first. He groped around until he found two fair-sized stones; these he brought back to Peter, and the two of them started to see whether they could pry off the cover with these elementary tools.

It was a difficult job. The sticks kept breaking, and the boys hammered their fingers as often as they did the wooden chisel. Presently Rodney stopped. Sitting back on his ankles, he caught Peter by the elbow and pulled him down beside him. "That won't work," he whispered very softly.

To the great amazement of both boys the words were hardly whispered before a bright circle of light fell on the chest in front of them. Each whirled around, only to be met with the glare of a pocket electric torch aimed at them from the other side of the thorn-bushes. Some one came pushing through the bushes and stood above them, the light still in their faces.

"Well, I swear!" some one exclaimed. "If it ain't two little rats nibbling at our old trunk!" The voice was the rather high and whining voice of Samuel Parry.

There was nothing for the boys to do except await orders. Rodney was caught and he knew it. Doan came through the thorn-bushes, and took his stand beside Parry.

"Ain't they cute?" he said. "Our young friend from the mainland, and one of those smarties who was camping out so innocent like."

Then his tone of voice changed, and was no longer easy bantering, but very indignant. "What are you two doing here? What do you mean by trying to rob honest men in the middle of the night?" Neither boy made any reply. There was nothing they could say.

It was perfectly plain why they were where they were. "Get up and come along!" ordered Parry. He kept his electric torch on the two boys as they got to their feet.

"Come along with me!" commanded Doan, and he retraced his steps through the bushes.

Rodney and Peter were marched down to the beach, the circle of light playing on them. There was a small fire that the men had built early in the evening and the boys were told to sit down near this.

"As long as you waked me up, I reckon we might as well have a little chat," said Doan. He took a

pipe from his pocket, filled it, and lit it with a twig from the fire.

"Turn off the light, Sam," Doan suggested. "We can see each other right enough here." Parry switched off his torch, and the two men sat down near the boys.

"Let's see, what's your name?" Doan asked Rodney. Rodney told him. "How'd you and your two pals come to leave your place down there?" Doan next asked, nodding his head to the south. "I suppose the other two are somewhere's about."

"We thought we'd like to take a little cruise, same as you did," Rodney answered.

"Same's we did," repeated Doan. He began to chuckle, and then to laugh. "My, my, but we're all making a lot of mystery out of this!" he exclaimed. "Playing a game of hide-and-seek, I should call it. First you thought we was coming 'round spying on you-all, and now it looks as if you-all was coming 'round to spy on we-all. They're trying to turn the tables on us, Sam; that's what they're doing."

Doan continued chuckling, as if to indicate a desire to show his good nature. "Now see here, Mr. Rodney Mason," he said. "The sea and these islands are free to all, so far as I'm concerned. We don't mind your sailing up here, if you've got a mind to; but we didn't come prowling 'round your camp in the middle of the night, trying to steal things from

you; and so it don't seem hardly right that you should come out here to prowl 'round us."

"But you did steal something from us!" exclaimed Rodney impetuously.

"Oh, no, we didn't; no indeed," Doan returned quickly. "We didn't take nothing that belonged to you. Findings is findings, you know. If I was to see an old lobster-pot floating out on the water, and it didn't have any buoy, nor owner's name, I'd have as good a right as another to pull it into my boat."

"But that chest was on Mr. Blossom's land," Rodney maintained stoutly.

"That chest!" ejaculated Doan. "Oh, you mean the old black box up there in the woods. What do you think of that, Sam? He thinks we stole our old box from his friend down there."

"I know you did," said Rodney. "I saw it down there on our island, and I saw it up here to-night."

"Well," said Doan, "what's the use of our fighting over an old chest? I reckon Mr. Blossom can buy another easy enough, if he wants to."

"And I reckon he doesn't have to buy another. If you'd stolen one of his chickens, he wouldn't have to buy another, if he could find the one you had taken from him."

"See here, young man," declared Doan, "I don't like the way you use that word stolen. My friend here and I are respectable gentlemen. What we've

got is ours, and I don't care to hear you say we stole it. Also, we mean to keep what we've got, and you might as well make up your mind to that."

He turned to Peter Calkins. "Don't you believe a word he says," Doan went on. "His friend Blossom's got a grudge against us; that's all there is about it; and now he's keeping us all up most of the night. I reckon you're pretty sleepy. There won't be anything more doing till breakfast time, so you can roll up again and go to sleep."

He turned to Rodney. "How'd you get over here? I don't reckon you swum." Rodney, feeling that he had already said too much, decided to keep his mouth shut. "Oh, very well, you came in a boat then," said Doan. "This island ain't so large that I can't find the boat pretty quickly."

"Keep your eye on the young cub, Sam, till I come back." Doan walked off through the woods, leaving Rodney feeling very much like a prisoner just put in jail. He felt as if he had bungled his business badly. From time to time he glanced at Parry. The latter seemed to pay little attention to him, but sat pulling his moustache, and occasionally poking the embers of the fire.

Some time later Doan paddled up to the beach in the small duck-boat. He pulled it up on the sand. "Now we're all nice and comfortable," he said as he rejoined the others. "We've got an extra boat this way. It ain't very long till morning now. I'll just

smoke my pipe and keep a lookout for any other callers. When I get tired, I'll wake you up, Sam, and we can stand watch like a regular boat's crew. You two lads had better be getting your beauty sleep."

Peter climbed up to the long grass above the beach, and in a few minutes Rodney followed him. He knew that Doan meant to keep an eye on them the rest of the night. In spite of being a prisoner, he felt tremendously sleepy. Almost before he knew it, he had shut his eyes and was sound asleep.

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XIV

HARE AND HOUNDS

PARRY and Doan were at work on the motor-boat, using the tools that Peter Calkins had brought over to them. The little canvas duck-boat was drawn up on the shore close under their eyes, so that there would be no opportunity for any one to leave the island without their knowing it. They had waked early, and had shared a meagre breakfast with Rodney and Peter. Doan was talkative as usual, but he said nothing about the chest or the boys' pursuit of it. His talk was all of what should be done to the motor-boat to make it seaworthy again.

Rodney was at first rather glum at the prospect. Blackbeard's chest might as well have been in China as where it was, so far as he was concerned. The slightest movement he made toward the thicket would be instantly noticed by Doan. If he could do nothing to recover the chest, however, he might at least see what he could do to get back to his friends, and this thought, together with breakfast, made him feel more lively.

Peter seemed to regard the whole affair as a great spree. He went down to the beach and watched the two men while they worked on the flooring of the boat. After he had observed them for some time he joined Rodney, and the two strolled along the shore.

"Don't you get your feet wet," Doan called after them sarcastically. "If you wait till we get this yacht of ours fixed, we'll take you up north with us and land you somewhere."

The boys went on without answering him, and presently came around the island to the place where Rodney had landed the night before. He could see the point opposite where the camp had been, but there was no sign of Tom or Stephen or Mr. Blossom.

"I hate this being kept on the island," said Rodney. "It makes me feel so shut in." He looked at the stretch of water, not much more than a hundred yards wide. "I've half a mind to try swimming across," he said. "Are you a pretty good swimmer, Pete?"

"Reckon I am," said the other boy. "I've swum that far lots of times; but I didn't have my clothes on." He glanced up and down the stretch of water. "There's a shoal out there, about two-thirds the way across. We could touch bottom there, the water ain't more than two or three feet deep."

"I wonder," said Rodney, "if we couldn't manage to carry our clothes on our backs. They don't weigh much, and we could strap them 'round our shoulders by the belts. I've half a mind to try it."

The idea evidently appealed to Peter, too. He dipped his finger in the water. It wasn't very cold, and looked exceedingly tempting for a swim. "I've

gone farther than that lots of times," said he. "Come along, I'll show you the way to that sand-flat."

With their clothing rolled into tight bundles like knap-sacks, and fastened to their shoulders by Rodney's leather belt and the heavy cord that took the place of a belt in Peter's costume, the two boys waded into the water and struck out for the shoal. They were both good swimmers, and the weight of the clothes made little difference to them. Peter headed for the sand-flat, and when he reached it stood up and rested his arms and legs. A minute later Rodney stood beside him. They looked back at the island; but there was no sign of either Doan or Parry. Evidently it had never entered the head of either man that the boys would think of swimming to the mainland.

When they were somewhat rested they started out from the shoal and presently reached the mainland. They waded ashore, and sat down to dry off in the sun. "Pretty good idea, that," said Rodney, beaming. "Won't they be surprised when they find we're gone?"

The bundles of clothes were unrolled and hung on the bushes; then while these dried the boys poked about to locate the camp. They found it was close to the place where they had landed. No one was on watch, however. In fact there was no evidence of any one having camped there, except for the boughs that had been used as beds.

When they got back to the shore they found their clothes were at least partly dry. They got into them and set off southward. There was no sign of "The Wild Goose" in the creek, and they went on till they came to Calkins' Cove, and there they saw the rest of the party, and also the fisherman, his wife and daughter. Rodney gave a whoop. "Ki-yi!" he yelled. "Scouts ahoy! We've escaped from the pirates!"

The group at the harbor looked 'round in amazement.

"How on earth did you get here?" cried Tom.

"Swam across!" shouted Rodney. The two ran up to the group, holding out their wet sleeves as evidence of what they had done. "But we had to leave the duck-boat over there," Rodney explained. "Want to hear the story?" he asked.

"Go ahead," said Tom. "When we found you didn't come back we decided to tell Mr. and Mrs. Calkins just what had happened. They know all about what we're doing now."

"So do I," spoke up Eliza-Jane, "and if Pete can help you, I don't see why you don't let me too."

"Now you know you oughtn't to talk like that, Eliza-Jane," said Mrs. Calkins. "Lord knows I've plenty of work for you to do right here, and besides that you're a girl."

"I reckon I'm as strong as Pete," said Eliza-Jane. "I can handle a boat as good as any one."

"You can that," agreed her father, nodding his approval of his flushed-faced daughter. "You're the smartest one of the family; excepting your ma, of course," he added, with a sly smile at his sharp-featured wife.

"Well, this is what happened," said Rodney, sitting down cross-legged on the ground. He gave an account of how he had found the iron chest and tried to open it, but had been caught in the act. "And they are working on the old 'Sea Serpent' now," he finished. "Then they'll get the chest on board again and scoot away with it."

"Why don't we go over there and take it from them?" Eliza-Jane said, evidently wishing to have an active share in whatever was done. "They're only two, and there's seven of us."

"You see," said Mr. Blossom, shaking his head, "it's a delicate situation. Possession is nine points of the law, you know. They won't give it up if we demand it, and I don't like to take it from them by force, if we can help it. We can't prove that they got the chest from my island."

"Well, I should think that was as clear as anything could be," protested Stephen.

"Yes, we know it is," said Mr. Blossom, "but we can't positively prove it. We didn't see them take it. All we know is that the two chests look just alike, and that they were hunting where we found it."

"You mean we ought to snatch it away from them, as they snatched it from us," said Rodney.

"That's the idea; without a fist-fight over it," said Mr. Blossom.

"'Pears to me," said Mr. Calkins, "that's going to be a mighty hard proposition. They won't give it up; and they won't let it out of their sight most likely. What's to hinder them from taking it up to Charleston if they please."

"We've got to hinder them somehow," said Tom positively. "It's our treasure, and I don't mean to let them get it."

"And while we're talking here they may have got their boat all fixed," said Eliza-Jane. "I'm going out to keep an eye on them." She walked down to the boats in the little cove, climbed into the row-boat, and picked up the oars.

"I'm going too," said Stephen, and he ran down to the row-boat and stepped into the bow. "Let me have one of the oars," he said.

The girl handed one to him, and the two started to pull out of the cove.

"Peter and I'll go in that old tub of mine yonder," said Mr. Calkins, pointing to a fishing-boat on the sand.

"And the rest will take to 'The Wild Goose,'" Tom announced. "Now we've got a fleet of three ships. We'll swoop down on the island and see what's happening there."

"Well, I'd rather stay on dry land," said Mrs. Calkins. "I don't go hunting pirate's gold when there's cooking to be done." With a wave of her hand she went up the path to her house. Then the three boats set out from the harbor, Eliza-Jane and Stephen pulling at their oars sturdily, Mr. Calkins standing up in the stern of his boat, and sculling it along by the skilful use of an oar, and "The Wild Goose" quickly passing the other two, and leaving a rippling wake behind.

The flotilla reached the western side of Cow Island and headed toward the northern point. "The Wild Goose" had naturally taken the lead, owing to its greater speed. Peter, running up the sail on his boat, kept going at a good clip. But the two in the little row-boat found themselves quickly out-distanced. The sun was pretty warm. Stephen looked over his shoulder at the boats ahead of him.

"I don't see what's their hurry," he declared. "The men couldn't get away from here without our seeing them now. Let's take it easy." He pulled in his oars, and so Eliza-Jane had to stop rowing also, unless she wished to spin the boat around from her side. Stephen let his hands drag in the water—a very pleasant feeling on a hot day. "You're a pretty good rower for a girl," he said to his companion. "I suppose Peter taught you how."

"I always knew how," she answered. "Folks who live by the water naturally take to knowing how

to row." She turned on her seat, and surveyed him calmly, though her freckled nose, tilted at an angle, made Stephen suspect she was a little sarcastic. "You row pretty well yourself," said she, "and I don't understand how you came to know how. Did they teach you at your school in Charleston?"

Stephen drew his right hand out of the water, and flipped the drops from his fingers toward the end of his oar. "Most of the things I know I didn't learn in school," he answered. "That is, most of the useful things, I mean."

Eliza-Jane rested her chin in the palm of her hand. "What I want to learn is un-useful things," she said. "Seems as if we naturally picked up the other things somehow."

"What do you mean by that?" Stephen demanded, interested in spite of himself at this original girl.

"Oh, I mean about pictures, and music, and such things," said Eliza-Jane. "And all they teach me at school is reading, writing, and arithmetic."

"Hum," mused Stephen. "What good would learning those other things do you? I know a boy who has to take violin lessons, and I think he's just about the dumbest boy in our town. I suppose though," he went on very meditatively, "girls like music naturally more than boys do. The great musicians always have long hair, and girls' hair's much longer than boys'." He grinned mischievously

as he surveyed Eliza-Jane's long pig-tail. "I reckon you ought to be musical with so much of it."

She was on the point of scooping some water in her hand and splashing it over her teasing companion when the boat gently swung its bow against a rock.

This unexpected bump was enough to make Stephen lose his seat and sprawl in the bottom of the boat. Eliza-Jane quickly shoved out her oar and pulled the boat away, then she turned and smiled serenely at Stephen.

"That's what happens to folks that make fun of others," she said. "You'd better get your oar out, or we'll drift ashore."

Stephen, a little ashamed of his position, hastily took his seat and rowed again. "Why, the other two boats are out of sight," he said. "We'd better hurry, or we'll miss the party."

Meantime "The Wild Goose" had rounded the northern end and was slowly making southward. Mr. Blossom kept some distance from land, but the boys could see that Doan and Parry were still at work on their motor-boat. "The Wild Goose," like a patrolship, went down the coast and around the southern point. Some distance back of her came the sail-boat with Peter at the helm, and by the time the first two of the fleet had made a complete circuit of the island the row-boat, pulled by a red-faced boy and girl, came along the shore fairly near to the two men. Doan looked up from his work. "Hello!"

he called, waving his hand to the boat. "Out for a little paddle?"

"Hello!" Stephen returned. In a whisper he added, "I'd like to paddle him, the old thief!"

"If you want to land here, don't mind us," Doan continued. "We ain't selfish about this here island. There might be some nice places to picnic up under the trees."

"I like the other man better," muttered Eliza-Jane. "Look at him now; he's pulling his long black moustache; and somehow he's got a wild look like a pirate ought to have."

"I reckon he's a deep thinker," Stephen whispered back. "He doesn't say much. There's something about that other fellow that always makes me want to talk back to him, and then I get in wrong." He waved his hand. "We don't want to land there," he called back. "There's plenty of islands around here for everybody."

"It don't seem so," said Doan jeeringly, "considering the way we keep meetin' up with each other."

Again the girl and boy rowed on, and presently joined the other boats, south of Cow Island. The trip had only assured them that the men were still there. Stephen paddled back and forth around the other two boats; then he suddenly gave an exclamation. "They've started off!" he cried. "Look there, they're out in their boat, going north."

"Sure enough, they're off again!" cried Rodney.
"Time to hit the trail!"

"Then," said Tom, "I guess we're done camping here. There's no knowing how far up the coast they'll go. Stephen, you come aboard, and Mr. Calkins can tow the row-boat back to the cove."

Peter and his sister looked regretful at the idea of losing the fun of the chase, but as there was no telling how far it might lead, it was clear they would have to leave their new friends.

Stephen climbed into "The Wild Goose," and Eliza-Jane got into the sail-boat, holding the painter of the row-boat in her hand. "We'll come and tell you all about it when we've got the chest," Stephen called out. "Good-by." He waved his hand, and the boy and the girl in the other boat waved back.

Then began a run up shore, in which "The Wild Goose" had to go slowly, in order to avoid overtaking the rather unwieldy "Sea Serpent." The treasure-seekers' plan was still to keep an eye on the others, rather than to come to a fight with them. Perhaps Doan and Parry realized this, for they seemed to make no great attempt at speed, and chugged along at an easy rate most of the afternoon.

The sun set, and beautiful opal colors shone in sky and sea before "The Sea Serpent" turned her course inland.

"I guess she's started to leak again," suggested Tom.

"Suppose they keep this up—stopping leaks and patching their boat up, all the way to Charleston," said Rodney. "It looks as if we might get left after all."

"I'd hate to have them get to Charleston with the chest," said Stephen. "I don't see how we'd ever get it away from them then."

"Well, they're not there yet," counselled Mr. Blossom. "We must keep our eyes wide open, and see if we can't find a chance to steal it back from them."

"The Sea Serpent" came to land on a point jutting out in the sea. "The Wild Goose" turned shoreward a little south of this point and ran along the coast. Investigation showed that the point where the men had landed was almost cut off from the mainland by a narrow neck. "The Wild Goose" landed, and her crew got out. In the twilight they could see the shine of the water across a short stretch of sand-dunes and bushes.

"I think we might camp here," said Tom. "They can't go by us on the land side. We'll have them shut off here, and then we'll only have to watch the water side."

The boat was made fast and the stock of provisions taken up to the sand-dunes. Supper was eaten and a protected shelter found where they could make a comfortable camp. Then the four chose watches by drawing blades of grass. Each in turn

was to stand guard in the motor-boat, using the oars instead of the motor, and keep a watch to see that the two men didn't leave their point before dawn. The first watch fell to Tom. At eleven o'clock he was to wake Rodney, who would keep the watch till two o'clock; then Mr. Blossom would be on duty till five; and after that Stephen until time for breakfast.

All but Tom made comfortable nests in the dunes. Tom pushed "The Wild Goose" out from the shore, and picking up the oars, slowly sent her over the water. Drifting, and occasionally paddling noiselessly, he patrolled the coast off the point. There were no sounds from the place where Doan and Parry had landed. Sometimes he heard a crane or heron squaking inland, but except for this and the slapping of waves against the boat the night was very still. So, like a blockader watching for runners who might try to evade his net, he patrolled the point. At eleven o'clock he landed and woke Rodney, and so off and on the crew of four kept watch all that night.

XV

BLACKBEARD'S CHEST

It was Stephen who caught the first signs of activity on the point of land. He had been floating about in "The Wild Goose" for almost an hour, watching the stars pale as the earliest light of dawn began to creep up from the horizon. Away out to the east the ocean commenced to brighten, and as he watched he saw sea and shore grow more and more clear, almost as if a veil of fog were being lifted by the bright sunshine.

He had let the boat drift some distance down shore when he first became conscious of motion on the point. The beach there formed a scallop, and it looked to Stephen as if the two figures were digging in the sand near the base of a pine that stood up high above its fellows. He didn't wish to be seen, and so he didn't attempt to row the boat any nearer. He watched the two as best he could, and then when they walked inland, he dipped his oars in the water and pulled slowly down shore, still keeping watch to see that neither Doan nor Parry left the point. If they did leave, it would have to be by water, since the rest of the party were camping directly across the narrow neck of land.

It was clear daylight when Stephen turned "The

Wild Goose " about and headed back to camp. Keeping close to the shore, and dipping the oars into the water as lightly as possible, he felt pretty sure that the men would not see him. In this way he came to the neck, where he found the others all ready for breakfast.

" Well," said Tom, as Stephen landed, " what have you to report? Are our two friends still on the point? "

" Aye, aye, sir," answered Stephen, touching his hat in salute. " They're still there, and we can see them from here if they try to leave in the daytime. Give me something to eat; I'm hungry as a bear."

Provisions were beginning to run low, but they still had some hard-boiled eggs, and cold corn-bread that they had bought from Mrs. Calkins, and some deviled chicken, jam, and a bottle of spring water, that had been among the stores brought from Mr. Blossom's house. With these they managed to make a good breakfast, and were just putting the bottle of water back into the forward compartment of the motor-boat, when Rodney gave a muttered exclamation.

" Look there! " said he. " They're going south, instead of north! What do you make of that? " The others turned to look. The old " Sea Serpent," with Mr. Blossom's duck-boat bobbing along some little distance to the rear, was laboring over the water in a south-easterly direction.

"I thought surely they'd be taking the chest to Charleston!" Tom exclaimed. "Do you think they can be going back to Beaufort with it?"

"Search me," said Mr. Blossom, shrugging his shoulders. "From the way that motor-boat spits and wallows in the waves, it looks as if they might be going to dump the chest in the sea."

"There's only one thing to do now," said Tom, "and that's to keep on the trail. If they're going back to Beaufort, I guess we'd better be going back too.

So "The Wild Goose" was started, and sailed by the point of land where the men had camped overnight, and then to the south-east in the wake of the other boat. If Mr. Blossom had driven her fast, she would soon have overtaken the wallowing "Sea Serpent," but as he had no wish to do that, unless "The Sea Serpent" were actually in danger of foundering, he kept well to the rear waiting to see what the others would do.

This sudden change in tactics mystified the crew of "The Wild Goose." Why should Doan and Parry be going south instead of up to Charleston? Tom asked the question why, if their boat was unseaworthy, had they not landed and taken to the road? And he answered his own question by saying that the chest was undoubtedly much too heavy to be carried, and they had had no chance to get a team to transport it. If they got safely into Beaufort with

it, what could the rightful owners do then? Mr. Blossom suggested that he would go to a Justice of the Peace and have Doan and Parry arrested on the charge of stealing something found on his land. But it seemed hardly likely that the two men would walk into such a trap. If they were going to Beaufort they must have some plan by which they saw an opportunity to make sure of the chest's contents for themselves.

Such speculations filled the time while "The Wild Goose" bobbed along on the track of "The Sea Serpent." They were retracing their course of the afternoon before. Presently Cow Island came in sight and beyond it the shores of Calkins' Cove. Then, to the surprise of the pursuers, "The Sea Serpent" ran up to the beach on Cow Island and came to a stop just about the place from which she had started the day before.

"They must be pretty fond of their old camping-ground," said Stephen.

"No," said Mr. Blossom, "I was watching that boat pretty closely, and I think she's sprung a leak again. I believe they thought they couldn't get any farther in her."

"Let's run up close by," said Tom, "and ask if we can help them out with our boat. I'd rather have a talk with them than keep up chasing them at such a long distance."

"There's something in that," Henry Blossom

agreed, and he sent his boat swiftly up to the shore, and brought it to a stop some fifty yards away from the men on the beach.

Tom stood up. "Hi there!" he called. "Want any help? Has your boat sprung a leak? Want us to come in and tow you somewhere?"

The two men on the beach looked at the speaker, but made no answer. They were untying the rope that held the duck-boat to "The Sea Serpent's" stern.

"What do you think they'd do if we dashed in and tried to take the chest?" asked Stephen.

"I don't know," said Mr. Blossom, "but I guess they've each got a gun; and I wouldn't like to run the risk of coming to a fight with them."

"Seems as if we ought to do something," put in Rodney. "There they are with Blackbeard's treasure, and here we are who own it, and we can't take it from them. Seems as if we ought to think up some way to do it."

Before they had thought up any way, however, the men on shore settled the matter. They had pulled the duck-boat up the beach, and now got into it, and Doan, picking up the double-paddle, sent the little canvas barge skimming out over the water.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Stephen, "they must have thought we were going to pounce on them!"

"But what," demanded Tom, "have they done with the chest?"

The duck-boat was speeding away. "The Sea Serpent" lay slightly tilted to one side on the beach. Mr. Blossom sent his boat quickly up shore, and in a minute the boys were over the side, wading to "The Sea Serpent." They caught at the gunwale and looked over the side. There in the motor-boat stood the old chest, its iron cover very rusty in the bright sunlight.

Tom sprang on board and gripped the battered metal cover. It still stuck as it had when they first discovered it. "We've got to hammer it off," he said. "Let's take it over to the cove and get what we need there."

"I'll tow it over," said Mr. Blossom. "It'll only take us a few minutes that way."

He brought his boat close up to the other; a rope was fastened between them, he started his motor, and "The Wild Goose" chugged away, pulling "The Sea Serpent" with its three passengers behind it. The second boat leaked badly. Water came up about the base of the chest. But the distance to Calkins' Cove was short, and ten minutes later both boats were in the little harbor there. Tom ran up to the fisherman's house to get a hammer and chisel, and he came back accompanied by Eliza-Jane and Peter.

"The Sea Serpent" was brought close to shore, oars were put under the chest, and by the united efforts of the party the chest was lifted out of the boat and rolled up on the beach. The lock had already

been broken. All they had to do now was to pry up the edges of the lid and force it back on its hinges. This they did in short order. The edges bulged out; another blow from the hammer, and the lid came off with a crash.

The chest was empty, except for two small discolored disks that lay on the bottom.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Tom. "Is that all Blackbeard hid?"

Stephen picked up the two disks. They were two coins of a dull glitter. He held them out on his palm so the others might see. "Two measley gold pieces!" he said in great disgust.

"But they are guineas!" said Mr. Blossom, picking one up and looking at it closely. "There's the head of George I stamped on them."

The two coins, the solitary contents of such a large chest, seemed actually to mock at the three young explorers. It was clear, however, that there must have been more than these in the treasure-box, or no one would ever have gone to the trouble of hiding it so carefully on Blackbeard's Island. The two pieces of gold were only evidence that many more like them must once have filled the chest.

Even the faces of Peter and Eliza-Jane shared the disappointment to be seen on the faces of the three scouts.

"At least these two are very fine coins," said Mr. Blossom, holding them on his palm, "and they

prove that somebody did actually hide money on that island way back before the Revolution. What shall we do with them?"

"Put them in your pocket, please," said Tom. He was evidently not nearly so much interested in the coins from a collector's point of view as from that of a baffled hunter.

Tom was twisting his pet lock of hair, Rodney kicking the iron chest vindictively, Stephen staring at the water of the cove, while Eliza-Jane was watching Mr. Blossom, and Peter was tossing pebbles into the cover of the chest.

"And those two fellows have made off at last," said Tom, in a slow, rumbling voice, "leaving us to find the old box empty. But I didn't see them take anything out of the motor-boat, and put it in the duck-boat, and yet they must have had the treasure with them."

No one ventured a reply.

Peter landed a large stone in the open cover, and his sister instantly nudged him with her elbow, and told him not to make so much noise. Mr. Blossom was looking out over the water. The canvas-covered duck-boat had already disappeared. "And goodness knows where the two are by this time," Tom went on in a more ruminating way. "They may have landed anywhere, or they may be half-way back to Beaufort. If we'd only had sense enough to have kept one eye on them, while we kept the other on the chest."

"Pretty hard on one pair of eyes to stretch them as far as that," muttered Rodney.

Eliza-Jane gave a chuckle, but quickly suppressed it, realizing that this wasn't a time for idle laughter.

"If they're still paddling the duck-boat," said Mr. Blossom, "I could pick them up in 'The Wild Goose;' they couldn't get far away in so short a time."

"But suppose they've landed meantime?" said Tom. He twisted his pet lock until it stood up like a horn, a sign that he was thinking deeply. "What I don't understand," said he, "is this. We didn't see them take anything out of the motor-boat and put it in the duck-boat, and we were watching pretty closely. Now, if they had a lot of treasure they wouldn't have been apt to tow it along behind them in the duck-boat all the way out to Cow Island."

"You can't tell what a fellow like Doan would do," suggested Rodney. "He'd do most anything to other people's things."

Stephen abruptly broke into the conversation. "They may have landed somewhere down along the coast," he said, "or they may be still on the water. I'd like to try out an idea of mine."

"Come down to dots with it," said Rodney. "What's the good of keeping us guessing."

"It may be all wrong," said Stephen; "but then it may be all right."

"Oh, rats," said Rodney. "What the dickens

is it?" Rodney looked openly scornful, and all the rest seemed very little concerned with Stephen's notion.

Eliza-Jane, however, perhaps because she realized from experience that Stephen was a bold and original thinker, stepped nearer to him and said, "I reckon your idea's as likely to be right as anybody else's."

These were kind words, but Stephen paid no attention to them. "It won't take us long to find out, anyhow," said he. "Will you do as I tell you?"

Rodney gave the chest a resounding kick. He didn't approve of Stephen's being so secretive with his ideas.

"I suppose we might as well," said Tom.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Blossom, smiling. "I'm willing to take orders from Captain Stephen."

"First, I want to get a thick sack, a good big one; an old flour-bag would do. Have you got such a thing?" he demanded, turning to Eliza-Jane.

"There ought to be some in the shed back of the house," she answered. "Come along while I look." At almost the same minute Mrs. Calkins appeared on her porch and rang the dinner-bell. "You-all might as well have some food before you go," the girl added hastily. "You can't get along without eating, you know."

Stephen cared little enough about food while he was on the trail of his new idea; but the others accepted the invitation quickly. They trooped into

Mrs. Calkins' combined kitchen and dining-room, and ate hastily. Then Stephen and Eliza-Jane went out to the shed and found an old meal-bag that Stephen said would suit his purpose. This he took down to the cove and filled with small stones and pebbles from the beach. When it was filled it made a heavy weight, and took the combined efforts of the three scouts and Peter to lift it into Mr. Blossom's motor-boat.

"What will we do with the old chest?" said Tom, when they had their cargo on board, and were ready to depart.

"We might give it to a museum," said Rodney.

"It isn't so much to look at," explained Tom, though he eyed the old iron box affectionately. "But pirates owned it once, and that ought to make it interesting, seems to me."

"I vote we give it to Eliza-Jane," said Stephen. "I guess she'd appreciate it as much as anyone would." He intended this as a compliment, but he said it in a brusque, off-hand way, so that she might not feel that he intended any flattery. "Perhaps she could keep things in it," he added vaguely.

Rodney chuckled. "She might charge admission to see it. Put a sign on it, 'Blackbeard's Chest,' and make everybody pay a nickel for a look at it."

But Eliza-Jane, in spite of Rodney's chuckling, seemed really pleased at the suggestion that she should keep the pirate's chest. "I'll look after it

for you," she said, speaking to Stephen more than to the others, "and perhaps some day you'll all come back and take another look at it."

"That's a good idea," said Tom, "and I vote that we give Eliza-Jane one of those two guineas; then she'll have something better than the old box to remember us by."

Mr. Blossom took one of the gold pieces out of his pocket, and handed it to the girl, who flushed and looked very much pleased.

"Thank you very much," she said, "but I didn't need this to remember you by. I hope his idea works out all right." She nodded her head at Stephen.

The crew climbed on board "The Wild Goose." Peter waded out into the water and gave the boat a push; Mr. Blossom started his engine; and the boat swung her bow around toward the entrance of the cove. As the four sailed out into the ocean they looked back and saw Peter still standing in the water, and Eliza-Jane sitting on the shut cover of Blackbeard's treasure-chest clutching the gold piece tight in one hand, while she waved the other hand to them.

XVI

PIRATE GOLD

THE middle of that same afternoon saw "The Wild Goose" drawn close to the point of land where Doan and Parry had camped the night before. Stephen had not yet explained the purpose of his return to that region of pines and sand, but had simply asked Mr. Blossom to bring the boat inshore and make a landing there. That done, he asked Rodney to give him a hand with the bag of pebbles, which they heaved over on to the beach.

"I don't see what in thunder you want with that great white elephant of a meal-bag," snorted Rodney. "If it's just for exercise in throwing it about, I'd rather take mine in pulling chest-weights, they're lots easier to manage." Stephen didn't deign to answer. He only rubbed his arm thoughtfully, while he took a good look at the shore.

The seaward side of this point of land was only some thirty yards in length, and was screened at each end by a thick grove of pines. This had made a sheltered retreat where Doan and Parry had naturally enough supposed themselves invisible to any observer up or down the shore. The beach was shallow and covered with small stones. It shelved up into low sand-dunes, which rose to a height of perhaps

three feet before they joined the level surface of the high ground. Near the northern end of these dunes stood a tall pine tree, some of its roots being exposed in the sand, while others were in the firmer ground. Stephen looked carefully at this part of the beach, and then made a cross with his toe close to the visible roots of this pine.

"There," said he, "that's just about the place."

The others had watched him with the greatest interest.

"What are you giving us?" demanded Rodney. "Is this another one of Blackbeard's hiding-places? Or have you got on the track of some other old rascal who hid his property where nobody could find it?" Again Stephen didn't condescend to make any answer; instead he knelt down and began scooping up the loose stones and sand with his hands.

"How'd you happen to pick out this particular spot?" Tom asked. "There don't seem to be any signs around here that mark it off from the rest of the shore."

"Remember, Stephen, the coast-line's changed since Blackbeard's day," put in Mr. Blossom, smiling.

"Well, I don't mind helping hunt," said Tom, and he crouched beside Stephen, and likewise began to dig with his hands and throw sand and stones to one side.

"Might think we were woodchucks burrowing for a hole," said Rodney, as he joined the other two.

Then Mr. Blossom got on his knees, and the four of them sent the sand flying.

Ten minutes of this, and Stephen stopped. His fingers had struck something.

"Look," he muttered.

The others bent over the spot where he had been digging, and saw what looked like a piece of brown burlap.

"You've struck something sure," said Rodney, "though it might as well be part of an old sail as anything else."

"It's not an old sail," Stephen announced positively. He dug in with his fingers again, and shortly had uncovered a good deal more of the burlap.

"You'll be breaking your finger-nails at that rate," said Tom. "Let me have a try at it now." Tom dug for a while, then Rodney, and then Mr. Blossom. The burlap seemed to form a large sack, and it took considerable time and labor to get the sand away from it. At last, however, there was space enough for them to pull the burlap sack about little by little, and in this way they were able to get it nearly free. When they had all dug until their fingers were sore and stiff, they stood up and looked at the bag.

"I reckon we might be able to pull it out if we could all get at it together," said Stephen. "Let's have a try."

Again the four dug their fingers in around the

bag, and with a great deal of tugging and pushing finally hauled the heavy sack up to the level of the beach. They dragged it out on the sand.

"Funny," said Mr. Blossom, standing up. "That bag doesn't look as if it had been in the sand long. I should think it would be much more damp."

"It hasn't been there long," said Stephen mysteriously. He took his jack-knife from his pocket and stooped over the sack.

The bag was tied with a heavy string, just as a meal-bag is tied. Cutting through this string opened the neck of the sack. Stephen dropped his knife on the sand, and taking the loose ends of the burlap spread them out. The others, looking over his shoulder, saw what was inside. That was nothing less than round pieces of dull gold, just like the two they had found in the chest.

"Hello!" cried Mr. Blossom. "You've found it at last, Steve, my boy!"

Tom gave a long whistle. "Right-o!" he shouted. "It's the money, sure enough!"

"By golly!" sang out Rodney. "And to think we've found it after all this time!"

Stephen pushed the sack on to its side, and then carefully poured its contents on the beach. They were gold pieces, some fairly bright, some very dull, but all unmistakably of the same coinage as the two others that bore the head of King George I. There were dozens of them, scores of them, a hundred of

them, perhaps two hundred. As Stephen emptied them all out and held up the empty sack, the pile of gold had a strange look, as if it belonged indeed to the days of Blackbeard, rather than to the present time. There was a few minutes' silence while they all stared at the heap of coins.

"Hardly seems real, does it?" said Tom. Then dropping on his knees he ran his fingers through the gold pieces.

"I never thought there was any treasure," said Rodney. "I thought all the time that chest was just a joke, and when we found it empty I was sure of it. Whew, but there's a lot of money there! Think of old Blackbeard stealing all that from people in Charleston!"

"Perhaps from Mrs. Pinckney's great-great-great-grandfather," Stephen added.

"It was a lot of money for those days," said Mr. Blossom. "Let's see how much of it there is."

They squatted on the shore and began to count. They made the coins into piles of ten; and found that there were twenty of these piles with half-a-dozen coins over.

"Two hundred and six guineas," Stephen announced. "How much would that make?"

"A guinea was worth twenty-one shillings in the old days," said Mr. Blossom. "They don't make that coin now. Twenty shillings make a pound, which is about five dollars. So there must be quite a

little more than a thousand dollars' worth of coins there!"

They had been so much concerned with their search and their discovery that they had not noticed that the sun had set. Twilight was coming over the ocean. Tom looked out at the water. There was no sail in sight. It was clear neither they nor the treasure had been seen.

"I reckon this bag's strong enough to hold them," said Stephen; and, with Rodney's help, he shoveled the gold back into the burlap sack.

"Now tell us how you ever managed to think of this place?" said Tom. "I don't see how you ever hit on it."

Stephen grinned. He was very much flattered at the admiration for his skill reflected in the faces of his cousins and Mr. Blossom.

"Well, you know I stood watch in the boat early this morning," he explained. "I was drifting about a good ways off-shore when I saw our two friends from Beaufort working here on the beach. It looked to me as if they were digging near the base of this tall pine. I didn't think much about it, and I rowed away, so they shouldn't see me; but when we found the chest empty, it struck me all at once that they might have played a trick on us. I thought they might have taken out the treasure and hid it here, and then left the chest for us to find on Cow Island. They might have thought we'd take it back to Mr.

Blossom's house and open it there. If we did, that would leave them with a free field here, and when we were well away they could come back and dig up the bag. I'm sure that's what they were planning to do, only they meant to give us plenty of time to get out of the way before they came back."

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," agreed Mr. Blossom. "They hammered the lid of the chest on good and hard, and they'd naturally think we might go back to my place with it. Anyhow, they'd feel sure we wouldn't know where the gold was, no matter what happened. Pretty clever dodge of them, I call it."

"Pretty clever," echoed Rodney. "But we've got the gold in spite of them."

"Do you suppose they left the two pieces in the box as a sort of a sop to us?" asked Tom.

"If they did, I think we might return the compliment," laughed Mr. Blossom.

"Now, that was just what I was planning to do," put in Stephen. He pointed at the sack of pebbles that he and Rodney had thrown out of the motor-boat. "When I thought they might have left the money here, I thought they'd probably put it in a sack; that's why I asked Eliza-Jane for the flour-bag. We can make it look pretty much like the one we found, and then they can have the fun of finding it."

"Good enough!" cried Rodney. He went down to the other bag, and rolled it up where Stephen was

sitting. "It's a little bigger than the other," he said, standing them side by side.

"Take out some of the pebbles," suggested Tom.

Rodney opened the bag and scooped up several handfuls of small stones. This made the two bags practically the same size. "When we tie this one up they'll look as much alike as two peas in a pod," he said.

"And we can make them look even more alike," said Stephen. "Maybe if they open their sack and see some gold pieces lying on top, they won't bother to look any further, and will take it back to Beaufort with them. We can try it anyway." He looked up at Tom and Mr. Blossom. "Do you think we might waste a few guineas on them?"

"Surely," said Mr. Blossom. "We might give them a dozen. That'll pay them for the trouble they've taken, and our old friend Peter Doan can truthfully say that he found pirate gold, as he's always been wanting to do."

Stephen put his hand in the bag of guineas, took out a dozen pieces and spread them on top of the pebbles in the second bag. "There, if you just open the top and look in you'd think it was all gold," said he. "How about that?"

"Very well done," said Mr. Blossom.

The second sack was tied up and put in the hole where the other bag had been found. Sand and pebbles were scattered over it, so that the place looked

as it had when "The Wild Goose" first landed on the point.

"Now," said Tom, "we've got what we started out to find. The next thing is to get it safely up to Charleston."

"I'm feeling terribly hungry," said Rodney. "Don't you think we could have some supper before we do anything else?"

"Sure," agreed Tom. "We can put the gold in the motor-boat, and go around back of this point to the neck where we camped last night. No one can see us there, and we can have supper while we make our plans."

With the precious sack in the centre of their supper-table, which was a strip of moss, the expedition ate most of what was left of the provisions which were still in the larder of "The Wild Goose." None of the four wanted to take his eyes off the sack for more than a minute at a time, and Stephen was often tempted to untie the cord and look inside to make certain that the golden guineas were actually there. He resisted the temptation, however; but as soon as they had finished supper he made a suggestion.

"Seems to me we'd better divide the guineas and take them to Charleston by two different ways. Now we've got our hands on them we don't want to risk losing them through any accident to the motor-boat."

"That's a good idea," said Tom, "especially since we don't know just what our friends the enemy are up to. They might run us down with a bigger boat than 'The Wild Goose' and get the sack away. Why shouldn't two of us go by boat, and two take the road that runs up the shore?"

"I think that's a mighty good idea," said Stephen.

"I don't know much about the road," said Mr. Blossom. "They're not over-good around here, and it would be a mighty long tramp all the way to Charleston. Of course, you might be able to get a wagon to take you part way. It's some distance through to the railroad, almost as far, I judge, as it is to Charleston."

"We don't want the railroad," put in Stephen. "I think we could manage all right by hiring a rig from some farmer. That would be safer than guarding all that gold in the train."

"What do you think of dividing forces?" Rodney asked Mr. Blossom.

The latter, who was sitting with his back against a tree, leaned forward, hands clasped about his knees. "I think perhaps it would be the better plan," he said, "but the two who go by land have got to keep their eyes open, and not answer all the questions they're asked. It oughtn't to be so hard for those who look after the gold in 'The Wild Goose.'"

"It will give us a chance to use our wits," de-

clared Tom, jumping up. "Of course, Mr. Blossom will have to go in the boat, as he's the only one who knows much about running it; so we three must draw lots to see which one goes with him." He picked three blades of beach-grass, tore them in unequal lengths and held them out to Stephen and Rodney.

"The one who gets the longest goes with Mr. Blossom, and the other two take to the road," he explained.

The two boys drew. To Rodney fell the longest.

"The sea for mine!" he exclaimed. "I always did like the sailor's life better than footing it on shore."

Now that the party was divided in two, the next question was as to carrying the guineas. There was only the one sack, and it was clearly out of the question for Tom and Stephen to put half the gold pieces in their pockets. They went down to the motor-boat and searched through its lockers. Presently Rodney discovered a brown canvas haversack tucked away in the bow. It had a strong leather shoulder-strap, and had been used by Mr. Blossom to carry food on hunting trips by land. The strap could be adjusted so that the haversack would come about to Tom's hip. It was big enough to hold half the guineas, and had the great advantage of looking just like a scout's knapsack. It would, therefore, cause much less curiosity than would the sight of the boys carrying a meal-bag.

Taking the haversack into the shelter of the trees, Stephen untied the bag of gold and poured out what he judged to be about half its contents. These were put in the haversack, and on top of them some cotton-waste, which had seen service in the boat. The haversack was strapped, and then tied securely with a bit of rope. Tom lifted it and swung it over his shoulder. It was heavy, but they could carry it if he and Stephen took turn and turn about.

"I reckon we'll want to find a horse and cart before very long," Stephen chuckled, as he in turn swung the bag of gold across his shoulder.

"And whatever you do, never let it out of your sight," warned Rodney. "That cotton will keep it from clinking, so nobody ought to guess what's in it from its sound, but if they happen to pick it up it might make them awful suspicious."

"Trust us to keeping our eyes on it all right," said Tom, "and I'm going to use it as a pillow at night."

After more discussion it was decided that Mr. Blossom and Rodney should take advantage of the clear night, and start north in the boat. They could run for several hours before stopping to camp for the night. In this way if Doan and Parry should happen to be lurking around the neighborhood the two in the boat at least would get away.

Tom and Stephen each had a purse with sufficient money in it to pay for board and lodging, as well as

to hire a wagon to take them to Charleston. They could buy breakfast in the morning at some farmer's house. Each boy took a blanket, and as it was such a clear night they declared they would enjoy sleeping out in the woods.

All arrangements made, the two in "The Wild Goose" started out from shore, while the others stood on the bank and watched them swiftly glide across the water. No other boat was to be seen. Apparently "The Wild Goose" had gained a good start on any pursuer.

"That bag of guineas ought to get to Charleston all right," declared Stephen. "I reckon it's safe enough in its little cubby-hole up in the bow."

"And our bag's going to get there safely, too," said Tom. He patted the haversack that swung from his shoulder. "We can tell anyone we've got a sack of oysters here," he said. "Feels as much like a bag of oysters as anything else."

"Think of calling pirate gold oyster shells!" muttered Stephen. "I don't think Blackbeard would thank you for calling his treasure that!"

With the precious bag on Tom's back, and their blankets slung over their shoulders, the two boys set out from the neck of land inland. At first they had to break their way through a great deal of underbrush, but presently they came to a little path that led north. The woods were very still, the only noise being the crackling of twigs they broke, and the

occasional hoot of an owl in the distance. They tramped for about a half-hour, and then came to an open glade where the starlight showed them a good place to camp. No house was near—they had the woods to themselves. It was as good a place as could be found for two wayfarers.

Tom let the haversack rest on the ground and sat down beside it.

“I’m going to use it for a pillow,” said he, “and if anyone tries to pull it out from under my head there’s going to be trouble.”

“I don’t think anyone’s likely to try it here,” said Stephen. “I don’t believe squirrels and chipmunks care much for oyster shells.” They spread their blankets on the soft moss. Tom doubled his up so that part of it covered the haversack and made it a softer pillow. They laid down, but could not go to sleep at once. For some little time they talked about the day’s events.

“I think we’ve got the whole thing straightened out,” said Tom. “Of course, Doan knew that we were after the treasure. He’d seen Rodney and he’d seen us in ‘The Wild Goose.’ He knew he couldn’t get away in the sail-boat, or in that patched-up ‘Sea Serpent’ of his; so he thought his best plan was to try to fool us. That’s why he took out the guineas and hid them on the beach. Then he wanted us to find his old boat with the chest in it, while he and Parry paddled away in the duck-boat. He figured

out that when we found the chest was empty we wouldn't know what to do. He and Parry would have disappeared by that time; we'd have been thrown off their track; and we wouldn't know where they'd hidden the treasure. They'd probably land somewhere along the shore to the south and wait. After a while they'd go up to the point and find their sack again, and then they'd have a clear field to take it wherever they wanted. That was a pretty slick dodge of theirs when they saw they couldn't get away from 'The Wild Goose.' And it would have worked if you hadn't happened to remember you saw them digging on that point, Steve."

Stephen considered Tom's explanation for several minutes before he spoke. "That's all clear enough," he finally admitted, "except that I don't see why they didn't put the bag of guineas in the duck-boat when they left 'The Sea Serpent' on Cow Island. You'd think they'd want to keep their hands on those gold pieces."

"I thought of that, too," said Tom, "and I think the reason they decided to hide the sack in the sand, instead of taking it with them, was that they knew we were pretty close on their trail and might see them put such a big bag into the duck-boat. Of course they wanted us to think that the treasure was still in the chest, and if we saw them taking a big bag out of the motor-boat and putting it in the duck-boat when they reached Cow Island we'd be apt to

suspect that the chest was empty. Besides that, the bag of gold was pretty heavy, and that canvas duck-boat wouldn't carry much extra weight. Then, for another thing, we mightn't have stopped to open the chest, but have followed them at once, and in that case we'd have caught the treasure when we caught the duck-boat. They must have thought it safer to hide it where they did, and then paddle away, as if they'd given up the whole affair, and come back again when we'd decided the gold had vanished. That's the way it looks to me."

"I reckon you've figured it out all right," agreed Stephen. "I wonder how long they'll stay away before they decide we've given up the hunt?"

"As I work it out," said Tom, "they may stay away from that point for some little time. On the other hand, they might steal back there to-night."

"I wonder what they'll do when they find their sack's full of pebbles, with only a layer of gold?" Stephen inquired of the tree-tops hanging above him.

"By the time they do that," said Tom, "half the guineas ought to be nearly to Charleston by boat, and the other half on their way by land. I don't see how they're going to find either of us again." He stroked the bag that lay under his head. "To think that map in the box I bought at the shop really led us to pirate gold!" he muttered. "Seems almost too good to be true."

There was silence, the thick silence of the woods

at midnight, then some bird calling way off in the distance. "Blackbeard's gold turned into oyster shells," chuckled Stephen. "If they get uncomfortable, Tom, I'll try sleeping on them."

"They're all right," Tom answered. "One doesn't get such a chance as this every day in the year. Won't I have a story to tell when I get back to New York!"

Presently the two boys were asleep. The pillow of gold pieces, or oyster shells, made little difference to Tom, tired after the adventures of that day. He slept until the light of the rising sun broke in through the trees; then his first thought was to touch his pillow under his head. It was still there; the guineas were safe, so far at least.

XVII

THE MERCHANT'S WAGON

PEOPLE don't lie abed long in the woods in the morning. Sun and forest air, and the sight of forest things, make a camper eager to be up and in motion. In the case of Tom and Stephen, moreover, the sack of gold pieces didn't make the most comfortable pillow, for it reminded them that they wanted to start as soon as possible for Charleston.

The sun had not been up long when the two boys left their night's lodging in search first of breakfast, and then of a team to take them to town. It was Stephen's turn to carry the haversack. He slung it over his shoulder by the broad strap and marched off briskly toward the west. He knew that somewhere in that direction there must be a road running north and south, and the chances were that there would be at least scattered farm-houses in the neighborhood of the road.

It was a sparsely settled region, however, with more woods than cotton-fields or pastures, and they had to tramp a good hour before they reached a road. Wagon-wheels had made deep ruts in the sandy soil, and the road could have been little better than a bog in wet weather. Still it was a highway of some sort, and in all probability led to some farm-house.

"There's no telling which way we'll come to a house first," said Stephen, "but I reckon we'd better go north, as that'll get us so much farther on our way anyhow."

"What are you going to tell anyone who asks what you've got in that heavy bag?" Tom questioned. "I don't think they'll take much stock in its being oyster shells."

"I've got something better than that," said Stephen. "We've been out hunting minerals, pieces of quartz, and bits of rock with mica in them, and we're taking them home to study them. People do study minerals, you know; so I don't see why that won't sound all right."

"They might believe that," Tom agreed; "and it won't be so far wrong after all, for the haversack is full of minerals."

"Pretty nice specimens, too," said Stephen, patting the bag. "My, but I hope we find some breakfast soon! I'm pretty nearly starved."

They had to go some distance farther, however, before they sighted a primitive white frame house, built in a clearing to the left of the road. They marched up the path and knocked on the front door. Nobody answered the knock. Then they went 'round to the back of the house. There the household were gathered, a woman feeding corn to a lot of chickens, a man smoking a corncob pipe, and three small children playing with a dog. The man looked up and

nodded to the boys, though he neither moved in his chair nor took the pipe from his mouth.

"Howdy," said he, the pipe held tight in his teeth.

"Good morning," said Tom. "Could we get something to eat here? We haven't had any breakfast yet. We'd be willing to pay whatever's right."

The man looked too lazy to be at all interested in the proposition, but the woman stopped feeding the chickens and turned around.

"If you'll step into the kitchen," she said, "I'll get you some bacon and corn-bread and coffee." She tucked the youngest child under her arm, and hurried into the house.

"Go along and rest yourselves inside," invited the man, whose main idea seemed to be that of resting.

The two went into the kitchen, where the mere smell of boiling coffee made them hungrier than before. Soon the food was on the table, and the boys ate it under the approving eyes of the cook, who appeared very much complimented at the speed with which her bacon and corn-bread disappeared.

When they had finished Tom took a dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to the woman.

"Shucks, it ain't worth that much," she protested.

With a lordly manner he insisted that she keep the bill. Then, with Stephen, who had never let

the precious haversack leave his shoulder, they went out-doors again to interview the man.

"We've been off on a tramp for a couple of days," Tom explained, "and now we'd like to get back to Charleston as soon as we can. We thought we might find a horse and cart somewhere along here. It's pretty far over to the railroad, isn't it?"

"Most as far as it is to Charleston," agreed the man. He took his pipe from his mouth and regarded it contemplatively. "You ain't far from the village up here to the cross-roads. There's a man keeps a store there, Silas Sloan. He drives a wagon up along the shore to Charleston every week or so, trading with the farmers. He might fetch you along. Then there's a man there what's got a automobile. If it ain't broke down I reckon he'd take you up, if you pay him enough."

"How far is it to the cross-roads?" Stephen asked.

"Less than a half-mile," said the man. "I reckon you kin walk that fur, if you've been tramping for a couple of days."

"Yes, I reckon we can," agreed Stephen, smiling. "Good-day." He took off his hat to the woman, who had just appeared at the kitchen door. Then the two boys started back to the road.

The cross-roads was only a collection of a dozen houses with a store bearing the sign of Silas Sloan in the centre of the village. The boys went into the

store, where Sloan was weighing out brown sugar for a customer. As soon as he was free, Tom asked if there was any way in which they could buy a ride to Charleston.

Sloan considered the question. "Well, I'm going up along the road this afternoon," said he. "I reckon there'd be room for the two of you in my wagon. It ain't a railroad though. I stop along the way to take orders, and my two horses ain't thoroughbreds, and the road ain't no driving park; but I reckon it's better than footing it all the way. You'd have to spend the night at Jordan's; that's where I put up. I'll take you along for a dollar a head."

This means of conveyance seemed somewhat slow, so Tom said that he had heard there was an automobile in the village, and asked where he could find its owner.

"That's Jonas Hubbel's," said the merchant. "He's got a Ford. Sometimes it's running, and sometimes it ain't. You'll find him down to the third house, the one with the pink window-glass in the front door."

They found the house with the pink window-glass without any difficulty. The noise of hammering led them to suppose that the owner was out in a shed back of his house. There he was indeed, looking as grimy and hot as if he had just come up from a coal-mine.

The Ford appeared to be largely in separate pieces

to judge from the amount of metal that surrounded Mr. Hubbel. "We heard you had an automobile that you sometimes hired out to people to go to Charleston," said Tom. "We'd like to get there as soon as we can."

Jonas Hubbel stood up, and with a sweep of the back of his hand managed to smear grease over his cheeks, so that he looked like a clown at a circus. "There's the automobile," said he, indicating the separate pieces of metal. "But Lord knows how soon I'll get it together again! Run it on to a big stone last night in the dark, and did something to the engine. Mebbe I could get it ready by to-night, mebbe it would take me a day or two longer."

This wasn't exactly Tom's idea of rapid locomotion. The car, as it appeared in the shed, seemed to hold little promise of being ready for use for several weeks. "I don't believe we'd better take chances on that," he said, looking at Stephen.

Stephen nodded. "I reckon the horses would be surer," he agreed.

"Well," said Hubbel, "I can't promise nothing. I might have it ready to-night, and then again I mightn't. I don't blame ye, if ye take the horses. That there engine's a mighty pesky thing."

The possible use of the automobile being so doubtful, the two went back to the store, where they agreed to pay Silas Sloan a dollar apiece, if he would take them as passengers in his wagon. This meant

that they would have to wait until that afternoon to start their journey, but as the store-keeper assured them that they would find no other village along the road, and that the chances of hiring a team elsewhere were very poor, they decided to wait and ride with him, rather than push on now.

There was nothing to see in the village, and they had little desire to tramp through the fields carrying the heavy haversack, so they stayed on the porch in front of the store, and watched an occasional passer-by.

"I never saw such a sleepy place," said Tom, as he squinted out at the sunny, sandy road that ran through the settlement. "Seems as if nothing ever happened here."

"Don't believe it does," agreed Stephen. "Wouldn't it make these people sit up if they knew what was in our sack!"

"Ssh!" cautioned Tom. "Be careful. Why should the people get excited over a bag full of minerals?"

Dinner time made a break in the lazy day. Silas Sloan invited them to join him at his table, where his wife set out a hearty meal. After dinner the merchant began to make preparations for his trip. He got out two horses and a covered wagon from his stable. In the wagon he placed a number of boxes and bags containing the supplies he expected to sell to farmers along his route. The driver's seat was

wide, and would easily hold Mr. Sloan and the two boys. By four o'clock he was ready to start.

"That's a mighty heavy sack you've got there," said Sloan, as he watched Stephen climb up to the seat.

"Yes, it's full of minerals we've been picking up," Stephen explained. "You see we're making a study of minerals."

"Well, I hope you'll run across some with a streak of gold in them," chuckled Sloan. "That's the kind of minerals it pays best to find."

"I don't suppose there are many like that around here?" Tom asked.

"No, there ain't," the merchant agreed. "If there was I wouldn't be store-keeping."

Sloan took his seat, picked up the reins, and called to his horses. He drove out into the high-road, and turned north. He was a large, red-faced man of genial disposition, and now that he had no business on hand he expanded and talked a great deal as they rode along. Much of his talk was about the people who lived in that part of the country. According to him they were most of them as odd as a collection of animals in the zoo.

Occasionally they came to a house; then Sloan would stop and halloo. Men and women would come and buy something from him, or give him an order for something they wanted him to bring them from town. Sloan would tell the gossip of the cross-

roads, and in return the purchaser would give him any bit of news he might have.

"Sort of a newspaper, I am," he explained to the boys. "Don't know what these folks would do if I didn't come to see them a couple o' times a month. Git up there!" he called out to his horses, and again the wagon would bump along the road. The deep ruts and the many bumps made riding more laborious than easy.

"I don't wonder Jonas Hubbel has a lot of trouble with his automobile," Tom said, "when the wagon lurches about so."

"He has to fix it up most every week," said Sloan with a grin. "I'll stick to my horses till we get macadamized roads down here. Horses take to bumps easier than what engines do."

Sometimes the wagon would stop before a farm-house, and Sloan would unpack some of the boxes and bags that were piled up under the cover. It might be that the farmer's wife wanted to buy some soap, or some flour, or some baking-powder. Then would follow the usual sociable chat after the purchase was made. This would give Tom and Stephen a chance to slip down from the driver's seat and stretch themselves. They understood how it was that Sloan himself liked these frequent stops after such long stretches of bumping up and down.

It was late in the afternoon when the team pulled up before the most prosperous looking farm-house

that the boys had seen in that part of the country. It was a two-and-a-half-story frame house, with a barn considerably larger. Back of it was pasture land, and a good-sized corn-field extended on one side.

"This is where I allus stop for the night," Silas Sloan explained. "Amos Jordan's a good friend of mine. I do business for him in the city, and we like to talk over politics. Mrs. Jordan makes the best buckwheat cakes I've ever met with. You won't find nothing to complain of in Mrs. Jordan's table, I can swear to that."

With familiarity born of long custom, Sloan drove his wagon into the big barn. A young fellow about twenty years old came forward and shook hands with the merchant, who introduced him to the two boys as Dick Jordan, the farmer's elder son.

"Think you can take care of the three of us to-night, Dick?" Sloan asked. "These two chaps are going to Charleston with me."

"Oh, I reckon we can," answered the other. "I can bunk with Jack, and they can have my room for the night."

Stephen and Tom climbed down from the high seat. Stephen, who had carried the haversack over his shoulder all the afternoon, was very stiff from riding.

"Reckon you boys would like to stretch yourselves a bit," suggested Mr. Sloan. "Don't you wait

for me, I can see to the horses all right. Go along and ease your muscles."

The two went out of the barn, and took a look around the northern part of the farm.

"It seems safe enough here," said Stephen. "If we sleep on the sack to-night, there oughtn't to be any risk of losing it here."

"We've got to keep it by us," warned Tom, "even when we're down-stairs eating supper."

"You take it then," suggested Stephen. "It makes my shoulders feel lop-sided."

Tom took the haversack and slung it over his shoulders, while Stephen rubbed his side where the bag had hung. They went around to the front door, and sat on the little porch watching a small boy drive some cows up the lane to a nearby pasture; then Dick Jordan and Mr. Sloan joined them, and they went into the house, where they found Mrs. Jordan setting the supper-table.

It was arranged that the two should have Dick's room for the night, and he took them up to it, and brought them a pitcher of water. The room was on the second floor at the corner, and had a view of the road. When Dick left them Tom rested the haversack on the chair.

"I'm going to have a look at it, just to make sure the pieces of mineral are all there." He unstrapped the sack and looked inside. Under the cotton waste the guineas were safe and sound.

"It's going to look strange for me to wear that heavy bag at the table," said Tom, strapping it up again.

"Strange or not, it's got to be done," said Stephen.

"Right you are," agreed his cousin. "I'll have to pretend that we've got so used to carrying it that we don't think anything about it."

When they went down-stairs they found that Mr. Jordan and his younger son Jack had come back from the farm. They all sat down to the table, which was soon covered with a more elaborate meal than any the two boys had found since the evening they had spent in Colonel Whitney's house in Beaufort. It was clear that Silas Sloan had been right in looking forward to his occasional visits at the Jordans'. Mrs. Jordan saw that his plate was kept full. Over it, especially over the buckwheat cakes, Sloan would sometimes look up and nod to Stephen and Tom and give them a sly wink.

"So you young men are Boy Scouts, are you?" Mr. Jordan asked after a while. "Those look like good strong suits for roughing it, but I should think you would want to leave off that heavy knapsack part of the time." He was looking at Tom, across whose breast ran the broad leather strap of the haversack.

"Well, you see," said Tom, smiling, "we get so used to our knapsack that it seems natural to have

it at our side. I'm a great hand at losing things, too. I hardly dare take anything off for fear I'll forget it when I start out, and when you've got all your kit in one of these sacks, you don't like to run the risk of forgetting it."

"You don't carry one, I see," said Mr. Jordan, glancing at Stephen.

"No," was the latter's answer. "Tom and I take turns. We thought that was the easier way to do. You see we've been hunting minerals down near Beaufort. We had a fine time there, too. Have you ever been to Beaufort, Mr. Jordan?" In this way he tried to turn the conversation from the delicate subject of the haversack.

"You surely do set a good table," Sloan declared, as he finally untucked the napkin from his collar and put it on the table with a sigh, as if regretting that he was unable to eat anything more. "I always tell my wife that there ain't another table in the county can come up to yours."

"That must make Mrs. Sloan feel nice," answered Mrs. Jordan, her eyes twinkling at her guest's enthusiasm.

"She's used to it," Sloan went on. "When I get back from a visit here, she always says to me, 'Now I suppose you don't need anything to eat since you've been up to the Jordans.'"

"I'll trust her for evening things up with Silas," said Mr. Jordan, laughing. "I reckon she's as good

a trader at the store as he is. You don't lose any money, Silas, when you take these little trips."

The men went out on the porch for their talk on business and politics that Sloan had mentioned. Stephen and Tom and the two Jordan boys made themselves comfortable on the top rail of a three-barred fence.

"That knapsack of yours looks mighty heavy," said Dick Jordan, putting his hand on it as it hung from Stephen's shoulder. "You must have metal in it."

"Minerals," said Stephen shortly. "We've been hunting minerals."

"Let's see them," suggested Jack.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom suddenly, pointing his finger at the sky. "Did you see that shooting-star right over there toward the woods? My, but it was a big one! I wonder where shooting-stars go? Can any of you tell me?"

"Wish I knew more about the stars," put in Stephen, playing Tom's game for all it was worth. "That's something they ought to teach at school. What sort of school do you have here in the country?" This last question was aimed at Jack, who felt it incumbent on him to answer the question, and so entirely forgot his original request that he might have a look at the minerals in the knapsack.

Tom and Stephen kept the conversation in safe channels until Dick Jordan announced that it was

bedtime, as he had to be up very early in the morning. They left the men still arguing on the porch and went up to their room. Motherly Mrs. Jordan came up after them to see that they had everything they wanted.

"It's a shame for us to turn Dick out of his room this way," said Tom. "We could have slept anywhere."

"Not a bit of a shame," answered Mrs. Jordan. "Jack's got a nice room on the other side of the hall, with a double-bed in it same as this one here. Don't you bother about Dick. I hope you'll find his bed right comfortable."

"We ought to," said Stephen. "We've been sleeping out on blankets and boughs for a week. I reckon you'll have to call us two or three times before we wake in the morning."

"Good night," said Mrs. Jordan. "If there's anything you want, knock on Jack's door; it's the front room across the hall."

The boys were soon ready for bed. It seemed a shame to have to tuck the heavy knotty haversack under one of the soft pillows, but it had to be done. As Tom had slept on the haversack the night before, Stephen took it this time. He bunched his pillow up on top of it, which gave him a very high head-rest; but he was so sleepy that even this uncomfortable attitude made little difference to him.

It was Tom who woke with a start, at what

seemed the middle of the night, although a faint light was coming in through the windows. He was certain he heard some one turning the knob of the door to their room. He reached out his hand to Stephen, and gripped him by the arm.

"What's the matter?" muttered Stephen, as he turned sleepily.

In a minute Stephen too was wide awake. Both boys heard the door creak on its hinges; then some one came into the room. Stephen put his hand on the haversack under his pillow. The faint light only showed them some one moving about; there wasn't enough light to tell who it was. This some one crept cautiously about the room, and then around the bed on Stephen's side. When the figure was pretty close to him, Stephen drew himself up on one elbow.

"What do you want?" he muttered. "What are you doing here?"

The intruder stopped. "Didn't mean to wake you," he said. His voice told them it was Dick Jordan. "Thought I was so quiet you couldn't possibly hear me."

"I heard you when you turned the door-knob," said Tom.

"Gee, you two must be light sleepers!" rejoined Dick. "Why I came in on tip-toe, and you two are wide awake, as if I was a burglar. A person might think you was afraid of being robbed,"

he added, with a laugh. "But I don't reckon you have anything to lose, unless it's that precious knapsack of yours, with those minerals you were talking of."

Stephen's hand clutched the sack tighter. "How'd you happen to come in?" he asked. "It can't be much after midnight."

"Humph!" said Dick. "It's most six o'clock. I came in to get a sweater out of this bureau up by the bed. It's mighty cold this morning."

"Oh, is that all." Stephen gave a sigh of great relief.

Dick Jordan got the sweater and went out again. When he had had time to go down-stairs Tom whispered to Stephen. "Do you know I thought at first that must be Doan or Parry. Of course, it's ridiculous, for they wouldn't know where we were, but when I woke up and heard some one at the door, I felt pretty sure it was they."

"It's queer how he happened to mention the knapsack," said Stephen. "Seems as if he must suspect something."

"Oh, no, he doesn't," answered Tom. "He was just jollying us because I kept the knapsack on all last evening. He doesn't guess what's in it."

"Well, I shouldn't think he could," said Stephen. He looked at the faint light that came in through the window. "You have to get up pretty early if you live on a farm, don't you? I'm glad I don't

have to get up at this hour. Let's turn over and have another nap."

They slept for at least an hour more before a knock on the door woke them. "Breakfast's almost ready," announced the cheery voice of Mrs. Jordan.

"All right," answered Tom.

He woke Stephen. "Time to get up, Steve," he called. The latter rolled over, rubbed his eyes, and sat up. Then he pulled the pillow off the haversack, and, picking it up, slipped out of bed and put it on the table. "We ought to have you safe in Charleston by night," he announced, addressing the bag of guineas.

They were half dressed, and Tom was just drying his face on a towel, when there came a whirring noise through the open window. Stephen looked out at the road; then he suddenly jumped back as if he had almost stepped on a snake.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Tom.

"Not so loud!" muttered Stephen. "It's matter enough! There's a car out there, and Doan and Parry are in it!"

Very cautiously Tom tiptoed toward the window. He pulled one of the light curtains across it, and then peeped out between the curtain and the side of the window. In the road stood an automobile. Jonas Hubbel was at the wheel, and Peter Doan was sitting beside him. Parry had just stepped out of the tonneau, and was looking at the

Jordan house. Tom jumped back from the window. It seemed to him as if Parry's eyes might have caught sight of him.

"Thunderation!" he exclaimed. "We've got to watch out now!"

Stephen carried the precious haversack to the bureau, pulled open one of the drawers, put the sack inside and shoved some of Richard Jordan's clothes over it. "We've got to keep them from coming in this room at any cost," he whispered. "Who'd ever have thought that that Ford car could have been fixed up so quickly!"

"They must have ridden all night," whispered Tom. "I hope Jonas Hubbel didn't tell them that we tried to hire it!"

XVIII

THE AUTOMOBILE

FROM his hiding-place back of the curtain Tom continued to look at the men around the automobile. Jonas Hubbel had lifted the hood and was gazing intently at the engine. Peter Doan stood opposite him, also intently peering at the machinery. Samuel Parry, whose thoughts were evidently on a higher plane than that of cylinders, spark-plugs, and carburetors, was observing the house and the meadows beyond it with the eye of an artist, or of a man eagerly looking for prospects of food.

Tom caught Parry's words as he turned toward the automobile. "The old rattle-trap plugs along all right. If you tinker with it too much you'll get it out of order. Let's go in and see about breakfast."

Tom tiptoed away from the window to the bureau, where Stephen still stood guard before the treasure. "If they come in to breakfast they're sure to find that Mr. Sloan and two boys are stopping here; and what's more, that the two boys are us. I think we'd better leave before they look for us."

"The Jordans and Mr. Sloan will think that's mighty queer," said Stephen.

"It won't be as bad as being caught by Doan and Parry," answered Tom. "I think we can get

out by the window at the end of the hall. They'll be on the front porch, or else coming in at the door."

The two boys slipped out into the hall. A quick glance at the other rooms showed that they had the second floor to themselves, the rest of the household having gone to breakfast. The window at the rear end of the hall opened about three feet above the roof of the back kitchen door. On each side of this door was a trellis covered with vines. It would not be very difficult for two agile boys to make their way down to the ground by this ladder.

"I'll keep watch at the head of the stairs, and give a low whistle if I see anyone coming up," said Tom. "You get the haversack, and drop it out the window as quick as you can."

Stephen went back to their room, secured the sack and swung it over his shoulder. A minute later he was slipping out of the window on to the roof of the back doorway. Tom, listening at the stairs, heard Parry on the front porch asking if he could get a bit of breakfast there.

Tom stole back to the window, and saw that Stephen had climbed down by the trellis and stood on the ground. Tom made a gesture with his hand, and Stephen sped away across the short space to the barn, and darted around one side of it.

Tom climbed out of the window and let himself down by the trellis; then he too made a sprint across to the barn and joined his cousin. "We're all

right so far," whispered Stephen, "but I don't think we'd better stop here."

Peeping around a corner of the barn they saw that the automobile had been left in the road by the men, who had all three apparently gone in to breakfast. Feeling more secure now, the two boys took a line across the pasture back of the barn, came to a fence, which they climbed, and were soon in the shelter of a grove of pines. This was a good half-mile from the Jordan house, and certainly a safe distance from any probable searchers.

They sat down among the pines, and Stephen slipped the haversack from his shoulder. "There might have been trouble there," he said, with a grin. "Those two fellows would certainly want to have a look at Mr. Sloan's passengers. They'd have gone up-stairs and found us in that room, and then there'd have been the dickens to pay. They might have asked Sloan or Mr. Jordan if we carried anything with us, and they'd most likely have found out about this sack. I feel more comfortable with it out here."

Tom lay on the pine needles, his hands under his head. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day," said he. "They might have pretended we were running away with stolen goods, and hunted all through our room for it. I'm glad that automobile makes such a thundering loud noise."

They were silent for a time, during which Stephen took the opportunity to have another peep

at the guineas. "The next question is," he said, at length, "how are we going to finish the trip to Charleston? You know Mr. Sloan told us there weren't any other places where we could hire a team, and it's still too long a way to foot it."

Tom sat up and leaned his chin on his hand. "I think that after these fellows find we've taken French leave, they'll get tired waiting and go on in their car. When we're sure they're gone we can make tracks back to the house and say we were out for a walk before breakfast. Then we'll see if Mr. Sloan won't let us finish the trip in his wagon."

"That stuff about taking a walk before breakfast sounds sort of fishy to me," objected Stephen, "particularly when we went out by the back door."

"You leave that to me," said Tom. "I think I can put it over all right. Anyway they can't arrest us, and the worst they can do is for Mr. Sloan to refuse to take us any further."

They waited a half-hour, until they were so hungry that Stephen declared he was almost ready to try eating acorns. Then came a loud whizzing noise not very far to the west of them.

"Sounds like a quail rising," suggested Tom. "Oh, no, it must be—" He jumped up and ran noiselessly through the woods in the direction of the road. When he came back he was smiling. "It was that old automobile whizzing along," he announced. "I just caught sight of it going 'round the turn."

Hubbel and our two friends were in it. I guess they got tired waiting for us to come back there."

"Well, I hope nothing happens to it now," declared Stephen. "I'd like them to get to Charleston as soon as they can."

"I wonder why they're in such a hurry to get to Charleston?" Tom asked thoughtfully.

"Give it up," said Stephen. "I know I want to get the guineas there as soon as I can myself."

Assured that the pursuers were now safely on the road the two boys went back through the woods, and across the pasture to the barn. From there they sauntered calmly up to the front of the house. Silas Sloan and Mr. Jordan were standing on the porch.

"Well, for the land's sake!" exclaimed Mr. Jordan. "Here they are now! Where on earth have you two been?"

"Off for a little walk," Tom answered coolly. "We like to get exercise before breakfast." He looked at Stephen. "I'm afraid, Steve, we stayed too long; perhaps they've finished breakfast."

"I should say we had," announced Mr. Sloan. "And you didn't only miss breakfast, but you missed some men who seemed to take an interest in what you were doing."

"A tall dark man, with black hair and moustache, and a red-faced fellow in a sailor's cap?" inquired Tom.

"Yes," said Mr. Sloan. "They were travelling

in Jonas Hubbel's automobile, and they'd been on the road since three o'clock."

"We wanted to miss them," said Tom calmly. "We had some trouble with them about a boat down at Calkins' Cove. They thought we owed them some money, which we didn't; and they said they'd get even with us for it; but we were in the right, as Mr. Calkins can tell you if you ask him."

"They said something about some boys having taken something that belonged to them," assented Mr. Jordan. "I didn't take much of a liking to the way that red-faced fellow spoke about it."

"And you'd like him a good deal less if you'd seen him as much as we have," said Tom, beginning to feel that matters were clearing up, and that at least neither Mr. Jordan nor Silas Sloan was going to make any trouble for them. "Could we get something to eat?" he asked. "I know we didn't treat Mrs. Jordan right, but we're awfully hungry."

Mr. Jordan smiled. "Go right in," said he, "she'll get you something." He went on telling Sloan the things he wanted him to get in Charleston.

Mrs. Jordan had saved some breakfast, thinking that her two vanished guests might appear again. While the boys ate she told them what had happened.

"Those three men had breakfast here," said she, "and when I went up to your room to call you again, and found you weren't there, they wanted to know who you were, and what you looked like.

They seemed a good deal disappointed not to see you, and they stayed 'round a while thinking you'd come back. Somehow they didn't seem friendly to you."

"They weren't," said Tom. "I'm glad we missed them."

Mrs. Jordan surveyed the two boys, and smiled. "Well, I don't interfere with other people's business," said she, "but I'd rather take stock in you two youngsters than in those men. They didn't look as if you could trust them with the silverware."

By the time the two had finished breakfast Dick and Jack Jordan had come back from the farm. They were very much interested in the happenings of the morning, and as soon as they got a chance began to question Tom and Stephen about their acquaintance with the strangers.

"I reckon you done something to them they didn't like," vouchsafed Dick. "The fellow with the red face asked me on the quiet whether you had a bag of anything with you. I said you'd got a knapsack full of minerals."

"Oh, we had a scrap with them once over a motor-boat," said Tom quickly. "They're not interested in the minerals."

"Why did he want to know if you'd got a sack with you, then?" asked Dick.

"If you knew him as well as we do," said Tom, "you'd find he wants to know about everything. He's the most curious-minded man I ever saw."

"He did seem mighty curious," agreed Jack. "He asked an awful lot of questions about you."

"There you are," said Stephen, "that's just the way he is, always asking questions. That's the chief thing we don't like about him."

"Well, you got out of seeing him pretty slick," said Dick. "Looks to me as if you thought he might be coming, and got away on purpose."

"You've got a great head, you have," said Tom, nodding approvingly at the other boy.

"See here," put in Stephen, "if you ever come up to Charleston, you hunt me up. My father's George Sims. Everybody knows him. I'll tell you about this business then, but we want to keep it secret now."

"Sure, we don't want to dig out your secret," said Dick, "but I'll remember that, and hunt you up some day. I reckon Mr. Sloan's about ready to start." He held out his hand. "Good luck to you. Stop in again any time you're going along."

Silas Sloan was hitching up his horses in the barn. Tom went into the house and asked Mrs. Jordan how much they owed her for the night's board and lodging. That hospitable woman, however, declined to accept any payment, saying she was always glad to look after strangers, and especially such nice young fellows as Tom and Stephen.

The covered wagon drove around to the front door, and the two boys climbed up to the seat beside the driver.

"Got everything, Silas?" called out Mr. Jordan.
"Don't forget those cigars and that saddle."

"Don't forget that new kind of stove polish," added Mrs. Jordan, "and that pink calico."

"Don't lose your bag of minerals," called Dick, with a grin.

There seemed little chance of that, for Stephen had one arm clutched round the haversack, as it swung from his shoulder. They drove into the high road and turned north toward Charleston. For a time Mr. Sloan drove silently, then a grin spread over his face, and he turned to look at the two beside him.

"I don't know what your game is," he said, "but you two young rascals are up to something. Still, it's none of my business. You're paying me for your ride, and I like your company."

For the present at least neither Tom nor Stephen was disposed to enlighten Mr. Sloan as to their secret. He, however, didn't urge them to tell him, and so they rode along chatting of all sorts of things. The road grew better as they drove north, and the two horses had less trouble in pulling the heavy canvas-covered wagon. As a result they made fairly good time, and by noon reached the house where Mr. Sloan said he usually stopped for dinner.

The man and woman who lived here were quite as fond of gossip as the other people in that sparsely-settled country. Having heard Sloan's news, the farmer started to tell his.

"Jonas Hubbel drove by in that engine of his'n," said the farmer. "His party stopped for a little chat, while Jonas poured some water down the throat of his engine. One of the strangers had a fine black moustache, and the other looked like a clown I saw once to a circus. That's to say he had funny little eyes, and a round face like a pumpkin, and he says to me, 'You didn't see two boys travelling up this way, did ye? They was dressed in brown clothes, something like they wear in the army, only smaller,' says the stranger. I told him I ain't seen no such young fellows. Now I shouldn't wonder if you two was the ones that man wanted to find." He shook his head doubtfully. "From the way that engine of Jonas's started off after it had a drink, I'm feared you won't be able to overhaul 'em with your horses."

"Well," said Mr. Sloan, with a sly look at the two boys, "perhaps we don't want to overhaul them. Perhaps we don't care for their company as much as they care for ours. We're particular, we are."

"Well, they got away a good half hour ago," said the farmer, "so 'tain't likely you'll meet up with 'em. Come on in. I reckon dinner's ready."

They had a good dinner, and resumed the ride.

The words of the farmer had set Tom to thinking, and presently he volunteered to speak something of what was on his mind to Mr. Sloan.

"It's a fact we don't want to meet those two

men in the automobile," he said. "You told us this morning that you didn't care what we were up to, so if you don't mind I'd rather not explain the whole business to you; but they would like to meet us, and perhaps try to get something from us. Now we don't mean to let them have their way, so if we should happen to meet them you mustn't be surprised at anything we do. We're in the right about this, I promise you that."

"So do I," said Stephen, earnestly.

The merchant smiled as he looked at the serious faces of the two boys. "You don't look like crooks to me, and whatever you've got that those two men want, I don't believe you stole it wrongfully from them. No, sir! They look more like bad eggs than you do; so don't you be afraid that I'd side with them. I'll keep my hands off the business, unless you tip me the word what you'd like me to do."

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see," said Tom. When they had left the farm-house after dinner, Stephen had given him the haversack, and it now swung by its strap across his shoulder.

Stephen grew sleepy, and after looking back in the wagon he asked Mr. Sloan if he had any objections to his taking one of the horse-blankets that was rolled up back of the seat and stretching out for a nap among the bags and boxes at the rear.

"Make yourself as comfortable as you can," said Mr. Sloan. "If you'll push some of those boxes

'round and pull out some of the bags you'll get a pretty good place to sleep." Stephen did as the driver suggested, and very soon was comfortably napping, while the horses, sleepy also after their morning's work, kept slow pace.

The road wound on through woods, by open fields, and past an occasional cottage. Although they were fairly near the water they caught no glimpse of it, as timber ran close down to its edge. After a half-hour's nap Stephen woke up, and Tom took his place in the rear of the wagon, where he curled up comfortably behind a big bag of meal.

"We ought to get to Ashley River by night, oughtn't we?" Stephen asked, as he sat down by Mr. Sloan on the driver's seat.

"We ought to," said the latter. "I generally leave my team on this side of the river and fetch the things over in a boat."

There were a number of turns in the road at this point, and as they rounded a bend shaped like the letter S they found an obstacle in the road before them. Mr. Sloan pulled up his reins. Only a few yards ahead was Hubbel's automobile, and the owner, together with Doan and Parry, was trying to put a new tire on the left-hand rear wheel.

The wagon stopped at Sloan's loud "whoa!"

Hubbel, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, crouching by the wheel, paid no attention, and Doan, who was holding the tire and trying to follow the owner's

directions, didn't turn his head, but Parry, a hammer in one hand, and a screw-driver in the other, looked around, and then threw up his arm, as if commanding the wagon to stop.

"There's one of them now!" he exclaimed, and pointed the hammer directly at Stephen.

"Shut up!" commanded Hubbel. "We're just getting the pesky thing in place! Don't you turn 'round!" he ordered Doan. "Jack the wheel up a little higher."

Doan worked the jack so that the axle rose a couple of inches. "Keep an eye on him, Sam," he muttered. "I don't dare let go this blooming thing."

So it was Parry who strode up to the wagon and glared at Stephen with his black eyes. "Caught you at last, young fellow!" he said. "Suppose you climb right down from there, and let's see what you've got."

Mr. Sloan was leaning forward, calmly watching Parry, an amused twinkle in his eyes. Stephen, considerably startled at first, now resumed an indifferent expression, and looked at Parry as if he had never laid eyes on him before.

"Come down from there," repeated Parry, "or I'll have to pull you down!"

"I say," said Mr. Sloan, calmly, "what's your trouble, stranger? I'm driving this young man up to Charleston, and I don't see what you've got to say about it."

"He and his friend stole something from us," Parry declared. He shook the hammer in a very dramatic fashion. "And as long as there's any law in this here land, we mean to have our property again."

"Shut up!" roared Hubbel. "You're joggling this here wheel! It's hard enough to get the tire fixed without your screaming like that."

Parry, however, had no intention of keeping quiet now, even if the new tire never got on its wheel. "We had something down to the Sea Islands," he said, "and this here fellow's stole it away from us. It's the same as if a man would come and rob your chicken-coop. We'll have the law after them; that's what we'll do. Folks can't steal from us and get away with it." His eyes glared, and his black moustache bristled, as he waved his arms dramatically at the wagon.

"You'll frighten my horses, and they'll smash that automobile all to bits," Sloan declared quietly.

"Don't you do it; don't you do it!" cried Hubbel. "Keep your horses quiet!"

"Keep this here fountain of oratory quiet then," answered Sloan, nodding toward Parry.

"Can't you wait a minute, Sam?" put in Doan. "Just wait a minute. They can't get by while we're here in the road."

That seemed to make some impression on the black-haired man, for he turned toward the automobile, and glared at it instead of at the wagon.

Stephen took that opportunity to glance back over his shoulder to where Tom had been napping. To his great surprise Tom seemed to have disappeared.

Stephen looked here and there among the boxes and bags. It was clear that Tom was no longer in the wagon. Then Stephen smiled, and faced 'round again. "I reckon they may hold us up here some time," he said quietly to Sloan.

"From what I've seen of those machines," said the merchant, "it may take an hour or a week to get it going right." In a friendly tone of voice he called out to Hubbel, "Say, anything we can do to help you there?"

There was silence from the three men in the road, the tire was almost in place, and the moment was too critical for words.

"There," announced Hubbel, after a minute, "she's on! Gimme that pump from under the seat." Doan obediently produced the pump, and the work of inflating the tire began. Hubbel pumped for a while, then Doan, and then Parry. By their united efforts the tire was finally filled with air.

"Now she's all right again, I reckon," announced Hubbel, putting the pump and the jack and the other tools back in their box. He stepped to the front of the car and began to crank it.

"Hold on there," said Parry, "we don't want to start yet. We've got business with that fellow in the wagon."

Hubbel paid no heed. He swung the crank 'round three or four times before the engine started. "There," he announced, "she's going now. Jump in before we waste any more gasoline."

"No," said Doan, firmly. "We want a few words before we start along." He turned back toward the wagon. "Now, suppose you and your friend get down from there," he ordered, "and let's see what you've got hidden."

"Why should I get down?" asked Mr. Sloan. "I don't have to pump up my tires, or start my engine."

"I don't mean you," said Doan, "I mean that boy, and the other one in the wagon."

"There isn't any other one," answered Stephen. "I'm the only boy here."

"But there was two of you back there this morning," put in Parry fiercely.

"Well, we've shrunk since then," said Stephen. He looked over his shoulder. "There's only one here now. Isn't that so, Mr. Sloan?"

The merchant also looked back over his shoulder. "Seems to be only one," he declared positively.

"Well, you get down here," commanded Doan.

"I don't mind," agreed Stephen, and he slipped down from the driver's seat and stood in the road.

Parry strode 'round to the back of the wagon, and looked in at the merchandise stored there. He swung himself up, and pushed around among the

bags and boxes. "Nobody here," he announced. "There's only the one of them, Peter."

"Of course there's only the one," said Stephen, "and that one hasn't got anything you want." He started to take things out of his pockets to show the two men that he had nothing concealed in them.

Doan, a puzzled look on his face, surveyed him closely. "It don't look as if you had any of it on you," he announced. "Then what in thunderation have you done with it?"

"It might be hidden among them things," suggested Parry, nodding at the wagon.

"Now don't you go to touching none of my things," said the merchant. "I'll take my oath there's nothing in that wagon but stuff of mine from home which I'm taking along the road to sell."

Meanwhile Jonas Hubbel was growing impatient. "Do you two want me to use up all the gasoline?" he demanded, glancing over his shoulder. "I don't reckon I've got much more than enough to get us up to town. I didn't bargain to let you stop and chatter along the road this here way."

Doan went to the back of the wagon and poked at the bags and boxes. "Nothing that looks like it there," he said. "I reckon the others must have took it with them."

"I told you there was nothing there but what there ought to be, didn't I?" said Mr. Sloan, and he too seemed to be growing impatient, and there was

a touch of anger in his voice. "Now, take your hands off my things, and drive on up the road, or else pull up so we can get by you."

Doan looked at Parry, and Parry looked at Doan. Apparently they each thought nothing was to be gained by a longer parley with Stephen and the merchant.

"You mayn't have it; but the rest of your crowd have," said Doan sullenly, "and we mean to get back what belongs to us."

"So long as there's any law in the land we do!" declared Parry, and he brought his fist down on his open palm to add emphasis to his words.

"I'm going to start," proclaimed Hubbel.

The two men ran back to the car, and jumped into the tonneau. Hubbel started off with a whizzing noise that made Sloan's horses back away frightened.

"Good riddance, too," declared Mr. Sloan. "Next time anything happens to your car, keep it on one side of the road so folks can drive by you."

The men in the automobile paid no attention to this parting jibe. They looked straight ahead of them, while the car sped up the road.

Another bend in the road hid the automobile from sight. Stephen turned around, grinning at Mr. Sloan. "Narrow squeak that time!" said he.

Sloan nodded. "Pretty slick young pal of yours," he said. "Where the dickens do you suppose he's got to?"

XIX

GUARDIANS OF THE TREASURE

STEPHEN ran up the road far enough to see around the next bend. Beyond that the highroad ran straight for some distance, and he just caught a glimpse of the automobile disappearing a quarter of a mile away. It seemed clear that Doan and Parry were making for Charleston as fast as they could go.

Satisfied that the two men were out of the way for the present, Stephen went back to the wagon, where Mr. Sloan had now stepped down from the driver's seat and was stretching his arms in the road. The horses, tired with their long day of pulling, were glad to rest, and were nibbling at some bushes by the roadside.

"They'll stand without hitching all right," said the merchant, "while we hunt up that lost pal of yours." He scratched his cheek. "He certainly did disappear slicker'n a pin. Might have thought he was a greased pig from the way he rolled out from the back of the wagon."

"Tom's clever all right," said Stephen. "I reckon as soon as we came around that bend, and you pulled up your horses, he had his eyes on the road, and dropped out at the back before Parry

turned 'round. And the way the wagon stood he could have done that, and sneaked into the bushes without Parry catching a glimpse of him, even if he turned 'round mighty quick."

"And where the dickens is he now?" inquired Sloan.

For answer Stephen went back along the road. The merchant followed him; but there was no sign of Tom to be seen. He wasn't hiding behind any of the bushes along the road. "He might have taken to his heels and run," suggested Sloan presently.

"I don't think he'd run far," said Stephen. "He'd know that we would probably be looking for him soon. The chances are he'd stick around here somewhere, only so well hidden that nobody could see him, unless he wanted them to." Then addressing the woods to the east of the road Stephen said in a loud voice, "They've gone, Tom. It's only Mr. Sloan and me here. The coast's clear now."

Stephen's voice could have been heard a good distance through the woods, but there came no immediate answer. Then Stephen whistled, imitating the call of the killdeer, and presently the answering note came back through the trees.

"That's our private signal," Stephen explained. He went through the bushes in the direction from which the whistle had come, then he stopped and repeated the call. Again it was answered. After a few minutes he and Mr. Sloan stopped under the

spreading branches of a splendid oak. "It's all right, Tom," Stephen called out. "There's just the two of us here." A piece of bark fell on Stephen's head. Looking up he saw his cousin straddling a limb of the oak, well protected by leaves.

"They've gone, have they?" Tom called down.

"As fast as Hubbel's car could take them," Stephen answered. "The coast's clear. Come on down."

Tom climbed along the limb to the trunk of the oak and started to come down.

"Where's the haversack?" cried Stephen. "You haven't got it with you."

Tom grinned as he looked down at his cousin. "I'll show you," he said, and climbing round to the other side of the trunk he brought out the haversack from a good-sized hole. "They might even have spied me, and not found that," said he; "but I think it would have taken them a week of Sundays to find out where I was."

Boy and haversack reached the ground safely. "Well, you had me fooled for sure," declared Mr. Sloan. "When that man with the black moustache called to you to come down from the wagon I wondered what you'd do, and when I found you warn't there I was plumb amazed. I didn't see where you could have got to."

"I had my eyes open when we got to that turn in the road," explained Tom, "and I guess I saw

the automobile as soon as you did. When you called out whoa, and pulled in the horses, I rolled over the board at the back of the wagon, dropped into the road, and made for the bushes on the nearer side. I went up through them a good ways, and when I saw this big tree I thought that would make as good a hiding-place as any. Then to make sure, I put the bag in that hole in the trunk."

"That bag of minerals seems to be fairly valuable," said Mr. Sloan, with a smile.

Both the boys smiled as Tom slung the haversack again over his shoulder.

"I'll tell you about it some day, if you'll come to my house in Charleston," said Stephen.

"Oh, I don't want to butt into anybody's secrets," declared Mr. Sloan, amiably. "I had my sport in seeing you two rascals get the better of those two men. But we'd better be driving along now if we want to get up to the river by night-fall."

The three took their seats in the wagon, and Sloan drove on. The boys kept very wide awake now, for fear that at any minute they might find the automobile stranded in the road in front of them. But apparently Jonas Hubbel was meeting with no further difficulties. There was no sign of the car, and six o'clock found them at a farm-house without any more adventures.

Mr. Sloan announced that they would have supper there. The Ashley River was only a few miles

to the north now, and as they could easily reach it that evening there was no reason that they shouldn't satisfy their appetites. So they had a good supper, and set out to complete the journey.

They drove for a couple of miles, and then Sloan pointed ahead to a dim light.

"There's the river," said he. "There's a tavern back on the left of the road where I generally spend the night when I get here after dark. I reckon they can give you boys a room there, if you want it."

"I think we'd better push on," said Tom. "We ought to be able to get a boat somewhere along the shore, oughtn't we, Steve?"

"Surely," answered his cousin. "I've been over there lots of times, and plenty of men have row-boats for rent to take you to Charleston."

Tom took out his pocket-book and handed a two-dollar bill to Mr. Sloan. "You got us here all right," Tom said, "and it's been a big help to us. It would have taken us twice as long to do it on foot."

"I reckon it would if you'd carried that precious bag of minerals," said the merchant. He put the two-dollar bill in his pocket. "Well, I've enjoyed the trip first-rate. Some time when I'm up in the neighborhood of Mr. Sims' house, I'll stop in and hear your side of the story."

By now they had reached a clearing in front of the tavern. The latter was an old building with a lantern hung from an iron bar over the front door.

"It doesn't look very fine," said Mr. Sloan, "but the man who keeps it is a good-natured fellow, and he takes good care of the horses. If you'll come in for a minute, I'll ask him where you'll find a boatman to take you across the river."

The wagon stopped before the tavern door, and the passengers got down. The nearest door led them in to a small sitting-room, and here Tom and Stephen stopped a minute to adjust the strap of the haversack, while Mr. Sloan went into the hall in search of the tavern-keeper.

"It's a queer old place, isn't it?" said Stephen, after they had fixed the strap, and he had shouldered the haversack in place of Tom. "I don't think we'd better stop here long. There's no telling who might be prowling 'round."

A door on the other side of the room from that next to the hall stood partly open. Tom walked over to it, attracted by the sound of voices. Close to the door he stopped to listen. A man in the next room was saying, "You've got the warrant all right, have you? Hubbel says that man Sloan always stops here for the night. We can serve the papers on 'em when they drive in."

"Yes, I've got the warrant all right," said another voice.

"Seems to me I heard a team pull up a couple of minutes ago," went on the first speaker.

By now Tom knew the voice. He turned from

the door, caught Stephen by the sleeve, and hurried him out at the door on to the road. Once outside he whispered, "Parry's in there, and he's got a man with a warrant!"

"Parry!" exclaimed Stephen. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure," muttered Tom. "We'd better be getting away from here quick as we can!"

They stole down to the road, where they kept in the shadow of the trees. "I suppose they went over to Charleston, got a warrant, and came back here to seize us for stealing their property," muttered Tom. "We've got to keep our eyes open now."

"I know the way to the river," answered Stephen. With his hand clasping the precious haversack, he led the way to the river bank, and then along it. There were a number of houses back from the shore, but they were all dimly lighted. Across the Ashley River the boys could see the lights of Charleston. On the bank were several boat-houses, and they passed a couple of floats, but they saw no one to ask about a boat.

"I wish we dared take one of those," said Stephen, pointing to a couple of row-boats tied to the wharf.

"Better not," said Tom. "Then they might arrest us for stealing somebody else's property. That one warrant's enough."

They went farther up the shore, but with no success in finding a boatman.

"I don't like this much," said Stephen. "They may have fixed it so that if we ask for a boat somebody will nab us. Nothing doing along here. The only chance is that we may find one farther down the bank."

Keeping as well hidden as they could, they retraced their steps. Again they saw the light over the tavern door. They hurried across the road, and up the other shore. Presently they came to a man sitting on a bench before a small cabin smoking a pipe. Tom went up to him. "Do you know where we could rent a boat to take us over to Charleston?" he asked.

"It's pretty late for boatmen," said the man. "How much did you want to pay?"

"What's a fair price?" Tom inquired.

"Well, it will cost you a dollar, if you want my boat," said the man.

"All right," said Tom, "we'll take it. We want to get over to Charleston as soon as we can."

In spite of the boys' urgency, however, the boatman was provokingly slow. It seemed as if it were impossible for him to move fast. He got up from his bench, went into the cabin and stayed there for some time, while the two boys, fearful lest Parry and the man with the warrant might appear at any minute, suspicious also that possibly the boatman might be in league to catch them, kept in the shelter of the trees, and tried to curb their impatience. After

some time the man appeared again, carrying a pair of oars. He walked slowly down to the shore, found a tin can, baled water out of a row-boat with it, and at last announced that he was ready for his passengers to embark.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked, as he took his seat at the oars.

"Around the Battery, and up to the east side. I'll tell you where," said Stephen. "Just you get started, and I'll direct you."

"Land sakes, but you are in a hurry!" grumbled the boatman. "What's the trouble? You got the whole night, ain't you?"

The boys made no answer. Their one desire was to get away from the shore.

Slowly the boatman dipped his oars in the water and pulled out from the bank. The starlight showed their course plainly. Rowing first to the westward, the boatman rested on his oars a minute, while he rolled up his sleeves. Stephen in the bow thought he could catch a glimpse of some men coming out from the door of the tavern. "Perhaps you'd like me to do the rowing," he suggested.

"No, I wouldn't," said the boatman. "I don't trust no one with this boat but myself." Again he dipped the oars into the water, and slowly paddled along. Out across the river they went, and then turned to the east. They rounded the southern point of the city, and went up along the eastern side.

"You're sure you know where you want me to land you?" growled the boatman after a while.

"I'll tell you," said Stephen, who was watching the bank intently.

"There's no need going further than you have to," the boatman remarked presently. "You said Charleston, you know. You didn't say you wanted to go up into the country."

"I know," said Stephen. "You might point the bow in now."

The boatman pulled toward the shore, Stephen still keeping a sharp look-out ahead. He let the man draw close to the shore, and then directed him to pull along parallel to it. After a few minutes of this he told the man to stop rowing, and let the boat drift a minute. They were near a wharf; but there were a couple of men sitting on it. Over the still water they could hear the men's voices.

"Just a touch of the left oar," muttered Stephen. "I want to make sure this is the right place before we land."

"Might think you was a blockader," growled the boatman.

"Keep quiet," whispered Stephen.

They were only twenty yards or so from the landing when Stephen thought he could recognize the voice of one of the men. It sounded to him like Peter Doan.

"Hold on there," he whispered. "Back' water

with your left oar ; now pull away again. This isn't the place we want."

"Seems to me you're mighty particular," said the boatman. "My job was to land you at the town. This is as good a place as any other."

"If you'll do as we tell you, I'll give you fifty cents more," muttered Tom.

The boatman, muttering something to himself, did as Stephen bade, and pulled the boat out into the stream again. The sound of the voices in the boat appeared to have reached the men on the dock, for Stephen, closely watching the shore, saw two of the men on the wharf move along the docks in the same direction the row-boat was going. He suspected that while Parry and one constable were watching for them at the tavern where Mr. Sloan stopped for the night, Doan and another man were patrolling the wharves to seize them in case they got across the river.

It was a difficult problem to decide where to land with the least chance of being caught by Doan, and it was made more difficult by the fact that the boatman was getting more and more sullen, and was casting more and more hints as to something wrong in their actions since it was so hard for them to make a landing.

"What be you? Two fugitives from justice?" he demanded once. "I didn't figure on helping anybody to break the law."

"Please don't speak so loud," begged Stephen, realizing that voices carried far over the water in the still night.

"Afraid of being caught by somebody, are you?" growled the boatman. "Now, see here, I'm not going to row all the way up the Cooper River to-night. You got to decide pretty quick where you want me to land you."

Stephen's keen eyes saw a warehouse close to the edge of the water, and only a short distance in front of them. As well as he could make out a ladder seemed to hang from the warehouse door down to the water.

"Pull in there," he directed, pointing to this ladder. The shelter of the building would at least give them temporary protection from pursuers.

The boatman, looking over his shoulder, growled. "That's a pretty place to land," said he. "Howsoever I'd rather put you off there than row the rest of the night."

The boat drew near the dock. Tom took a dollar bill and a silver half-dollar from his pocket and put them on the thwart beside the boatman. "There you are," said he. "All you have to do is to pull up to that ladder, and the money's yours."

A minute later the boat bumped against the ladder, and Stephen, nimble as a cat, caught at the rungs and was scrambling up to the warehouse. Tom came after him; and as he climbed he heard the

boatman mutter, "Two young scamps, I reckon," as he pushed his boat out into the water.

The warehouse door was unlocked, the building being in a dilapidated condition, and apparently unused. Stephen pushed the door open, and Tom closed it again after them. A window at the opposite end let in some light, and by this they detected a door at one side of the building.

The window was low enough to give them a view into the street that ran along the water-front. As the boys, partly hidden, looked through the dusty pane of glass they saw a couple of men approaching. A street lamp shed some light, and as the men neared the window both Stephen and Tom recognized one of them as Doan. The other was a stranger to them.

"They've been tracking our boat up along the water-front," whispered Stephen. "I thought I heard Doan's voice down by that dock, where we thought of landing."

"They'll wonder what's become of us when they don't see our boat from the next wharf," Tom muttered. "We'd better get out of this shed as quick as we can."

There was only one door on to the dock, and that opened in the very direction where the two men had now gone. The only other way of escape was by the window. Stephen put his eye to the crack of the door while Tom tried to open the window. At

first it stuck and refused to budge, but after much pounding, which Tom did with as little noise as possible, the window consented to open.

"All right, Steve," Tom whispered.

Stephen ran across to the window, climbed over the ledge, and dropped to the ground outside. Then Tom scrambled over. Hardly were they both out in the street before a voice at the warehouse corner made them jump; then a street lamp showed them the round face of Doan and his small sharp eyes.

"Run!" muttered Stephen, and at the word he was off like a flash, dashing for the corner of the nearest street.

The bag of guineas was heavy, but Stephen had run many races at school and was as fleet as a deer. Tom, unincumbered with any extra baggage, ran as fast. Back of them they heard calls to stop from Doan and the man with him. They knew the men were giving chase, but neither boy took the time to glance over his shoulder.

The streets along the water-front were narrow and poorly lighted. The boys would dash down one alley and turn up another. Once or twice Stephen doubled on his tracks, and gradually he worked his way up nearer the centre of the city and far from the water.

Presently the boys slackened their steps and stopped for a few minutes' rest in the shelter of some lilac bushes that stood before a house.

"I reckon we've thrown them off the track now," said Stephen with a chuckle. "I've played hare and hounds through some of these streets before. If I hadn't had this bag I could have mixed them up a lot more. I could have taken them over some fences that I don't think Doan would want to climb."

"Let me have the bag now," said Tom. Stephen, whose shoulder was pretty well tired with the weight of the haversack, handed the bag over to his cousin.

"We're not very far from my house now," said he. "It's lucky Doan doesn't know my name, or he might have decided to wait for me there."

Making sure there was no one back of them in the street, the two boys stepped out from the bushes and trotted along toward Stephen's house. In a few minutes they reached the old white mansion, went in at the side gate, walked up the path, and stepped on to the porch. Through the window they could see Stephen's father and mother in the sitting-room. A red-shaded lamp cast a warm glow of welcome. Stephen took his key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and marched into the sitting-room.

"Here we are," he announced, "two of us, at least, and we're mighty glad to be here too!"

Mr. and Mrs. Sims were delighted to see the two boys.

"We were beginning to wonder what had become of you," said Stephen's father. "Colonel

Whitney wrote us after the storm saying you were all right. A day or two later we had another letter from him saying that you three boys and a Mr. Blossom had gone on a cruise in a motor-boat. I suppose that means you couldn't locate Blackbeard's island."

"But we did locate it," said Stephen. "We found the very place, and we found the very spot that was marked with the red cross; thanks to Tom."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Mr. Sims. "And what did you find at the red cross?"

"The pirate's treasure!" said Tom proudly. "And here's half of it." He slung the haversack from his shoulder and deposited it in the centre of the sitting-room table.

"You don't mean to tell me that you really found something hidden there?" exclaimed Mrs. Sims.

"Indeed we did, mother," said Stephen, who was now sitting on the arm of her chair with his hand on her shoulder.

Tom unbuckled the strap of the haversack, pulled out the cotton waste, and then tilted the bag and poured the stream of guineas on to the table. In the bright light of the lamp there was no mistaking the shine of the gold coins. Mr. Sims stood up and gave a long whistle of surprise.

"My word!" he said. "You did strike it rich, didn't you? I hadn't the faintest idea you'd find anything there."

"And that's only half what we found," said

Stephen. "Mr. Blossom and Rodney have the other half."

Mr. Sims picked up one of the coins and held it close to the light. "There's no doubt but what that's an English coin," said he, "and it's gold sure enough. Well, you boys have certainly had a great adventure!"

"We surely have," agreed Tom. "All sorts of adventures; and we hardly know whether they're over now. There's a couple of men in town would like to get their hands on us to-night. We had to run half-way here from the dock with them after us."

"You didn't steal the guineas from them?" asked Mr. Sims.

"No, indeed," said his son. "They stole them from us. Tom and I came by land, and Mr. Blossom and Rodney are bringing their half of the guineas in Mr. Blossom's boat. I should think they'd have been here by this time. You haven't heard anything from Rodney?"

"Not a word," said Mrs. Sims.

"I wonder what can have happened to them?" Tom asked. "They surely ought to have reached Charleston by now."

"I tell you what," said Stephen, "we've got our share of the guineas here, and we'll get father to lock them up in his safe, and then our hands are free. I don't care what Doan tries to do now, as long as he can't get his paws on the money. I suggest Tom and

I have a look at the docks again, to see if we can get any news of Mr. Blossom's boat."

"It's pretty late," put in Mrs. Sims. "It's after eleven."

"I think we ought to have a look for them," urged Stephen. "It might be we could be some help if they've got into trouble."

Tom had packed the guineas back in the haversack, and now handed it to Mr. Sims. "If you'll put it in your safe, we'll feel as if we'd got a big load off our shoulders, Uncle George," said he. "I'd like to see it locked up before I leave the house."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Sims. "You can't be too careful when you've got a treasure like that lying around. I must say you've handled this mighty well. It wasn't more than ten days ago when you found that box with the map inside it, and now you've actually put your hands on Blackbeard's treasure. You ought to go into the business of finding such things."

"I wish I could," said Tom, grinning.

Mr. Sims and the two boys went up-stairs with the haversack, and locked it in the small safe that stood in Mr. Sims' room. "I think that's a better place to keep it," declared Stephen, "than the chest we left at Calkins' Cove."

They went down-stairs again, and Tom and Stephen picked up their hats. "We won't be gone long," said Stephen, "but I think we ought to have

a look around to make sure 'The Wild Goose' hasn't met with any trouble."

"I don't believe you'll get any trace of it at this time of night," said his father. "However, you two have been managing your own affairs for some time now, so don't let me interfere. I dare say your mother won't mind if you sleep late to-morrow. It isn't every day we have a bag of guineas brought to our house."

The boys went out-doors and down the street. They took a trolley car and rode to the southern point of the city. There they left the car and made for the wharves. "I should think 'The Wild Goose' ought to have got here before us," said Stephen.

"So should I," agreed Tom. "If she hasn't got in, Doan and Parry are probably keeping a look-out for her. If they couldn't catch us they'll try all the harder to get hold of the others."

"That's what I think," said Stephen. "It won't take long to go along the shore and see if we can locate the boat. If we find it, we'll know that something's happened to Mr. Blossom and Rodney since they landed. If we don't find it, we'll have to keep watch in the morning and try to give them the tip that these fellows are on the look-out for them."

There was little motion along the water at that hour of the night. The boys went rapidly from one landing-stage to another, but at none of them did they find the familiar lines of Mr. Blossom's boat.

XX

THE ADVENTURES OF A MOTOR-BOAT

BEFORE Tom and Stephen had left the neighborhood of the point of land where they had found the bag of guineas, Rodney and Mr. Blossom had embarked in "The Wild Goose," intending to run north for a couple of hours before stopping for the night. Their half of the guineas, still in the bag in which Doan and Parry had hidden them, were stored in a small compartment under the bow.

The night was clear, and Mr. Blossom had no difficulty in steering "The Wild Goose" north along the shore. At the end of a couple of hours he slowed down his engine.

"I don't believe our friends the enemy could catch up with us now," said he, "even if they reached that point where we found the guineas a short time after we left it. If you feel as sleepy as I do, Rodney, the idea of a comfortable snooze on shore will appeal to you pretty strongly."

"I was beginning to find it hard to keep my eyes open," Rodney admitted. "I'm ready to turn in whenever you are."

The boat was accordingly steered to shore, and her crew of two picked out a stretch of beach sheltered by wind-breaks of pines at the northern end.

They drew "The Wild Goose" close to the bank, and made her fast by tying her painter to a tree.

"No use running any extra risk," said Rodney. "Now we've got our hands on the guineas, we'd better keep hold of them. I'm going to take them out of the boat, and put them where nobody can steal them without my knowing it."

The bag was brought out from under the bow, and Rodney, unconsciously imitating his brother's method of safe-guarding the treasure, spread a sweater over the bag and used it as a pillow. With the blankets, the two made themselves comfortable and soon fell asleep.

They woke to find themselves being stared at somewhat like a side-show at a circus. A stout woman, her hands on her hips, stood looking at them, and in a half-circle about her stood almost a dozen children. As Rodney opened his eyes one of the small boys clapped his hands and crowed like a rooster, whereupon the others began to crow also, in spite of the fact that the woman tried to keep them quiet.

"Ssh!" she whispered. "You'll be waking them two."

The two were already awake, however, sitting up and rubbing their eyes, as if ashamed of being caught asleep in broad daylight.

"Good morning," said Mr. Blossom, and he bowed to the stout woman, and waved his hands to

the dancing children. The bowing and waving were a signal for an outburst of more crowing by the smaller members of the audience.

A broad smile showed on the woman's face. "Good morning to you," she said. "We live just the other side of those trees, and one of the youngsters said there was two strangers camping here, so we all came to have a look at you."

"Just the way the Indians would have come to look at the first white men to land here," suggested Mr. Blossom, laughing. "Well, we speak the same tongue fortunately; but we haven't brought any beads or knick-knacks to make you presents." He glanced at Rodney's pillow, and saw that the bag was still under the sweater.

The children, evidently feeling that some sort of a game was on foot, began to clap their hands and dance about as if they were indeed a tribe of Indians.

"What have we got into?" demanded Mr. Blossom. "Is there an orphan asylum on the other side of the woods?"

The woman chuckled. "No, sir, there ain't any orphans here. Most of them's mine. The other side of the woods is Putneyville. I reckon you didn't know you was camping just outside of town."

"How big is Putneyville?" asked Mr. Blossom.

"There's a dozen families lives there," the woman answered.

"Oh, it's quite a large place, then!" said Mr. Blossom, and he stood up and brushed his hair with his hand, and smoothed out his coat. "I wonder if we could get some breakfast there."

"I can let you have some," agreed the woman hospitably. "It's only a step through the woods to my house."

"Good," said Mr. Blossom.

He picked up the sweaters and blankets, and taking them down to the shore threw them in the motor-boat. "We'd better take our bag of gold with us, Rodney," said he. "We may want to use some of the things in it if we meet any real Indians."

"Oh, so that's a bag of gold!" said the woman, pointing to the sack that Rodney now clutched in his hands. "I reckon you two are pretty good jokers! Well, we ain't got no Indians in Putneyville, though there's some people that behaves like Indians sometimes." She led the way through the woods, followed by the troop of children, and then by Rodney and Mr. Blossom, who carried the sack between them.

They had breakfast in the woman's kitchen, with the sack placed where Rodney could keep his eyes on it. Afterwards, the two went back to "The Wild Goose." Mr. Blossom looked in his gasoline tank and found it was almost empty.

"I've got to stock up somewhere," said he. "I haven't got enough there to last us up to Charleston."

Rodney stored the sack in its former cubby-hole,

and kept guard over it now, while Henry Blossom went back to the settlement. One of the twelve houses appeared to be a store in a small way, but although the store-keeper had the most varied assortment of goods for sale, he didn't include gasoline among them, nor could he direct his customer to any place in the neighborhood where he would be apt to find what he wanted. It appeared that Mr. Blossom could not have reached a place where it would have been harder to obtain gasoline.

"But I've got to get it somehow," he said, scratching his head in perplexity. "I've got to get to Charleston in my boat, and I've got to have gasoline to get there."

The store-keeper looked provokingly blank. "I don't know what you're going to do for it," he said. "We don't have no use for it hereabouts."

"Isn't there anyone near that runs an automobile or a motor-boat?" Mr. Blossom asked, after thinking for several minutes.

"No, there ain't," said the other man. "Well, yes, there's one man, Mr. Graham, who lives out on Cross-Keys Island. He's got a big motor-boat, but he ain't in the business of selling supplies."

"If he's got a motor-boat he must have some way of getting gasoline," argued Mr. Blossom. "Where does he live?"

The store-keeper very kindly left his store and walked down to the shore with the stranger.

"There." He pointed to an island a couple of miles to the east. "Mr. Graham's a rich man who owns that island and lives out there part of the summer. He's over there now. He's got a good-sized house, and all sorts of boats. He's grouchy in some ways, but maybe he'd let you have what you want, if you struck him just right."

"Then I'll try to strike him just right," said Mr. Blossom. "I think I have enough gasoline to run me out to his place."

He went back to "The Wild Goose" and told Rodney what he had learned. He started the engine and headed out to the east, while Rodney waved his hand to the audience of children on the shore. For half the distance the engine purred slowly, then it began to stutter, then it stopped.

"Guess we'll have to row the rest of the way," said the owner.

"All right," Rodney agreed. "It isn't far now."

Fifteen minutes later "The Wild Goose" was pulled up at the side of a little float at the northern end of Cross-Keys Island. Mr. Blossom looked at his watch.

"Nearly twelve o'clock," said he. "We're not making very good time to Charleston. However, you can't run 'The Wild Goose' without gas. Now let's see what Mr. Graham's like."

A path led up from the wharf to a low house built like a bungalow, looking very comfortable, with its

broad porch and wicker furniture. The two arrivals carried the sack between them, being unwilling to trust it out of their sight for a minute. A knock on the front door brought a negro servant, who informed them that Mr. Graham had gone sailing that morning, and might not be back for some time. Mr. Blossom explained that he wanted to buy some gasoline. The servant said that the gentlemen would have to wait until Mr. Graham returned, and invited them to make themselves comfortable on the porch.

"Nothing else to do, I guess," said Mr. Blossom, and he and Rodney sat down in two big wicker chairs.

There was a fine view of the ocean from the porch. The place was well kept, and evidently belonged to a man of means. After some time the negro servant returned with a pitcher of lemonade and some cakes and set them on a table by the guests.

"Well, this is very fine," said Rodney, "and since we've got the bag with us we oughtn't to complain." They drank the lemonade. They discussed what Tom and Stephen were probably doing. They walked about the porch. But they had to wait a long time before the owner of the house returned.

As a matter of fact it was nearly three o'clock before the sail-boat drew in sight and landed at the wharf. A few minutes later a short, sunburnt man with grizzled gray hair and moustache came up to the porch and looked somewhat surprised to find

two strangers there. Mr. Blossom introduced Rodney and himself, and explained the object of their visit.

“Want to buy some gasoline, do you?” said Mr. Graham, in an abrupt way of speaking. “Well, it’s pretty hard stuff to buy around here. However, I might be able to let you have a little. Come in to lunch first; I’m hungry as a bear.”

It was evident that Mr. Graham was a person who must be humored. He was dictator on his island, and the best way to get what one wanted from him was to agree with his notions; so Rodney and Mr. Blossom followed him into the house, putting their hats on the bag, which they stood on a chair in the hall, and went into the dining-room. Fortunately, Rodney’s chair at the table was so placed that he could have a view of the sack in the hall. Mr. Graham was a great talker, and in spite of his rather peppery way of saying things, he seemed glad to have two guests to talk to. When he discovered that Mr. Blossom owned an island near Beaufort, and was fond of hunting and fishing, he began to swap yarns with him. He had so much to tell him, in fact, that after lunch was over he led him back to the porch, and over a cigar continued to relate hunting experiences. Several times Mr. Blossom suggested that they would like to buy the gasoline and be on their way again, but each time Mr. Graham waved the idea away.

"There's plenty of time, my good sir," he would say. "We never do anything in a hurry here. I'll let you have all the gasoline you want, but let's not talk about that now."

So it went on until Mr. Blossom glanced at his watch. To his surprise he found it was six o'clock. "Really, Mr. Graham," said he, standing up, "I must be going on. We wanted to reach Charleston to-night."

"What, to-night!" exclaimed the other. "Nonsense, my dear sir, you're going to spend the night here with me! You couldn't do anything at Charleston to-night, you know. You wouldn't get there until midnight. I'll give you the gas in the morning."

He rapped on the floor with his stick, and when the servant appeared said, "Charles, see that the two guest-rooms are put in order. These gentlemen will spend the night with me."

"Oh, no, thank you"—began Mr. Blossom; but the other waved his argument aside.

"The two gentlemen will spend the night with me," he repeated, and then he chuckled. "I'd like to know how you're going to get away, unless I give you the gasoline."

"Well, I'll admit," said Mr. Blossom, with a smile, "that you've got us there."

"Of course I have," said the host genially, "and I'm going to keep you here until to-morrow. That reminds me of the way the old pirates used to do;

their guests had to stop as long as the chief wanted. By the way, do you have any stories of Captain Kidd's treasure down at Beaufort?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mr. Blossom, in an off-hand way. "I suppose there are stories of pirate's treasure all along the coast."

Mr. Graham leaned forward in his wicker chair and shook his forefinger mysteriously at his guests. "But I've got something better than that," said he, a twinkle in his eye. "There's a place on my island where Captain Kidd is said to have lived for a week while hiding Spanish gold in the woods." He glanced at Rodney. "Doesn't that make you open your eyes?" he demanded. "I guess you'd like to have a look at the place where Kidd camped out. I've always thought it was just the proper place for a pirate. I'll show it to you in the morning."

In the meantime, Mr. Graham insisted on showing his guests the grounds near the house. He took them to his garden, and then to a point from which there was a fine view of the coast, and when they came back from this walk it was time for Rodney and Mr. Blossom to go up to their rooms to get ready for dinner.

"I'll show you the rest of the island in the morning," Mr. Graham called after them, as they started for the stairs. "Hello, what are you doing with that heavy bag? Let Charles carry it up for you."

So Charles, the colored servant, took the precious bag and carried it up-stairs, being discreet enough not to ask what might be in it that gave it such a metallic sound. In his own room Rodney locked the bag in the drawer of the bureau and pocketed the key. "I should think that ought to be perfectly safe," he said to Mr. Blossom, when he explained what he had done.

"Perfectly safe," agreed his friend. "I don't think our host will start hunting for pirate treasure in his own house."

After dinner they sat on the porch again, and now Mr. Graham told them wonderful stories of hunts for pirate gold. He appeared to be a great authority on the subject of buccaneers, and had himself occasionally gone on a search for some of their hiding-places, although he admitted that he had never yet found any of their treasure. "And I'm afraid I never will," said he; "but it adds a pleasant romance to my island to think that possibly those old rascals did stop here once."

They spent a very pleasant evening on the porch, for Mr. Graham was a most entertaining talker, and when he said good-night he assured them that he would let them have all the gasoline they wanted next day, which was a recompense for the delay in their trip to Charleston.

Next morning, however, Mr. Graham insisted on showing his two guests the rest of his island. Mr.

Blossom protested that they must make an early start, but again the owner waved the suggestion aside airily.

"You can get to town by night easily," said he, "and I don't want you to go without seeing what a beautiful place this is. Then my young friend surely wants to see where Captain Kidd camped out for a week."

There was nothing for Rodney to do but say that of course he would like to see the place, so they tramped across the island to the southern end, where Mr. Graham showed them a small beach backed by woods, and explained that it was here tradition said that the famous buccaneer had landed and hidden his treasure.

"I've searched and searched," said he, "but I haven't found any yet. Perhaps you'd like to stay and help me look for it. How about that?" he asked, turning to Rodney.

"It's very good of you," Rodney answered, "but we really must be in Charleston to-night."

"I never saw two people in such a hurry!" exclaimed Mr. Graham, laughing. "Well, well, I mustn't urge you any more, I suppose. We'll go back to the house now; and I'll have my man fill your gasoline tank, and Charles shall put you up a box of provisions."

It took some time, however, to fill the gasoline tank of "The Wild Goose," and by the time that job

was completed Mr. Graham proposed the two should lunch with him. So they had a light lunch; and then, followed by Charles, carrying the bag of guineas and a small box of provisions, they went down to the wharf.

"What the dickens have you got in that sack?" Mr. Graham demanded, as he saw Rodney take it from Charles and stow it under the bow.

"Pirate gold," chuckled Mr. Blossom, as he stepped in and took his place at the steering-wheel.

"By Jove! I almost think you have!" said Mr. Graham, laughing. "Stop a minute and let me have a look at it."

"No time now," answered Mr. Blossom. "Pull in the rope, Rodney."

"Now you've got the gasoline, you're going to do as you please," said Mr. Graham. "Well, I hope you didn't mind my keeping you so long."

"We enjoyed it very much," said Mr. Blossom and Rodney together. "Good-by, hope to see you again." The engine started, and "The Wild Goose" pulled away from the wharf.

"What would he have thought if he'd looked in the bag!" muttered Rodney.

"It was a great temptation to tell him," said Mr. Blossom; "but mum's the word on a trip like this."

It was a cool afternoon, with a brisk breeze blowing. With plenty of gasoline "The Wild

Goose " sped along at a good pace. They ran fairly close to shore, but met with only a few fishing-boats. A little after sunset they stopped and ate supper from the box that Charles had generously filled. Then they went on again, taking their time, because, as Rodney suggested, it would be just as well if they didn't land at Charleston until after dark.

More wind blew up after nightfall, and fairly big waves beat against " The Wild Goose." Mr. Blossom reduced the speed, and Rodney kept a sharp look-out ahead for other boats and buoys. It was late when they reached the outer edge of the harbor, and here the skipper slowed his boat still more. Carefully " The Wild Goose " crept in toward the lights of the city.

It was nearly midnight when they came abreast of the docks. " Let me see," said Mr. Blossom. " I wonder where we'd better land. Oh, I know." He turned the bow toward the shore and ran carefully up to a dock.

The dock was not well lighted, but so far as Rodney could see there was no one on it. " The Wild Goose " glided up to its side. Rodney fended it off with a boat-hook, and then caught the hook in an iron ring. He stepped out, the painter in his hand. He made the painter fast to the ring.

Meantime Mr. Blossom had shut off the engine. " All right, Rodney? " he asked.

" All right," Rodney answered. The boy stepped back into the boat, and pulled the bag from its hiding-

place in the bow. Mr. Blossom helped him put it on the dock.

"Well, here we are at last!" the man said, standing up. "That was a good idea of yours to wait until midnight. We ought to be able to carry it up to Stephen's house without anyone seeing us." Mr. Blossom made sure that the motor-boat was all right for the night, then he and Rodney picked up the bag and climbed the gangway that led to the street running along the water-front.

As they stepped into the street they were surprised to find themselves confronted by three men. One had an electric torch, which he flashed on the bag the two carried.

"Hold up there!" said he. "You must be the parties we're looking for!"

"They are," said a voice Rodney knew well, the voice of Peter Doan. "They're the two we want, and they've got the stuff with them."

"That's right," said the third man, who was no other than Parry. "They're the fellows that stole the goods from us."

The man with the lantern took a paper from his pocket and read a few lines from it. It was a warrant for the arrest of Henry Blossom and other parties, whose names were unknown, on a charge of larceny, brought by Peter Doan and Samuel Parry.

"Guess you'll have to spend the night with me," said the officer. "It's a poor time to be getting bail."

Mr. Blossom, boiling with indignation, started to express his opinion of the whole performance; but he had hardly more than begun when two other people came racing up to the group. These two were Tom and Stephen. It only took them a glance to understand the situation.

"But they didn't steal anything from these two men," said Tom, angrily. "The two men stole something from us in the first place. You haven't any right to arrest Mr. Blossom and my brother!"

"We haven't, eh?" retorted the officer. "You can tell that to the judge in the morning. They've got to come along with me now, unless some one will go bail for them."

"I know some one who will; and that's my uncle, Mr. Samuel Sims. I reckon you know who he is," said Stephen.

"Yes," said the officer, "I know Mr. Sims."

"We haven't got any time to bother with him now," urged Doan.

"You've got to bother with him now," retorted Stephen. "You haven't any right to lock up Mr. Blossom and Rodney without giving them a chance to get bail."

"It ain't much out of our way to stop at Mr. Sims' house a minute," said the officer; and he added in a low voice to Doan, "He's a man I don't want to get in wrong with."

Both Doan and Parry remonstrated, but the

officer was firm in his desire not to antagonize the well-known lawyer. So the procession started for the street, Mr. Blossom and Rodney carrying the bag, while the officer came close behind them, keeping watch with his lantern to guard against any trick.

The streets were deserted now, and they met no one until they came to Mr. Sims' house. Stephen rang the bell, and presently his uncle looked out from an upper window.

"What do you want at this time of night?" Mr. Sims demanded. Stephen explained who it was, and a few minutes later the lawyer opened the door. "Come in," said he; and the party marched in. There the officer, assisted by Doan and Parry, explained his side of the case, and Mr. Blossom and the boys explained their side.

"I hate to wake the judge at this time of the night," said Mr. Sims, "but it seems the only thing to do." He went to the telephone and called up the judge's house. Presently he got the judge on the telephone and explained the situation to him; then the officer talked to the judge.

It was finally arranged that Mr. Sims should be surety for the safe-keeping of the bag of guineas that night, and should produce it, together with Mr. Blossom and the three boys, at the judge's room next morning. This didn't suit Doan and Parry at all, but the officer refused to make any objections to the agreement arranged by the judge and Mr. Sims.

"I know this gentleman," he said, "and I know that when he says he'll do a thing, he'll do it. I don't care if there was a million dollars in that bag; if he said he'd keep it safe over-night, I know he'd do it."

"I'll put it in my safe," said Mr. Sims. They were all in his sitting-room, and they saw him open a safe and put the bag of gold in it.

"Good-night, gentlemen," Mr. Sims then said. "We'll meet you at Judge Carter's office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I'm much obliged to you, officer. It would have been a shame to have made this gentleman and Rodney spend the night in jail."

Doan and Parry, looking rather crestfallen, left the lawyer's house, followed a minute later by the officer. The others stayed for a few minutes' talk with the lawyer, then they too took their departure.

"Well, we've got half the treasure safe at our house, and the other half's safe at Uncle Sam's," said Stephen, as the four walked to his home, "and I don't think Doan and Parry can get either half from us, now we've got Uncle Sam to help us hold it."

With his key he let them into the house, and then up-stairs. There was an extra bed in his room, which he offered to Mr. Blossom. Then each party told the other their adventures during the two days since they had last met; but even the telling of these didn't keep them long from getting to bed.

XXI

THE RIGHTFUL OWNER

THE three adventurers and their good friend Henry Blossom met Mr. and Mrs. Sims at the breakfast-table the next morning. Stephen's father and mother were very glad to meet the man who had played such an important part in the success of the expedition. Over the table many questions were asked, and each of the party contributed his share to the history of the last ten days.

"Doan must have got back to the place where he hid the gold very soon after we left there," said Tom, as they were talking over their adventures. "And then they didn't waste any time getting up to Charleston. I suppose as soon as they reached here they got those warrants and a couple of men to serve them on us; then Parry and one of the men went back to that tavern, expecting to catch Steve and me there when we drove in with Mr. Sloan, and at the same time Doan and the other constable kept watch along the river-front, ready to pounce on Mr. Blossom and Rodney. When Parry found out that Sloan had arrived at the tavern, and that the two of us had slipped away, he came over here and joined Doan and his officer. That's the way I size it up."

"And a sharp look-out they kept for 'The Wild

Goose,' " chuckled Stephen. " She couldn't have landed without one of them seeing her first."

" What's ' The Wild Goose? ' " asked Mrs. Sims.

" Mr. Blossom's motor-boat," said Rodney.

Stephen's mother laughed. " I think you ought to re-christen her now," said she. " ' The Wild Goose ' doesn't seem to suit a boat that's helped in capturing all those gold-pieces."

After breakfast they were all in the sitting-room when the servant announced that there was a man on the porch who would like to have a few words with Mr. Blossom. The man hadn't given any name, but said that he had come on important business. Mr. Blossom stepped out to the porch, the three boys with him, as if they were afraid that he might be kidnapped. To their surprise they found that the caller was Doan. He explained his errand without any unnecessary beating about the bush.

" See here," said he, " we've each of us had our hands on that money part of the time. Now my partner and I want to be fair with you, and I've come to suggest that we divvy up, half and half. We claim we found that chest on that island off of Beaufort, and you've got to admit that you tried to get it away from us. But we don't want to go to law about it, unless it's absolutely necessary ; so we're willing to play fair with you, and each take half."

" I think we'd better postpone this talk until ten o'clock at Judge Carter's office," answered Mr. Blossom.

som. "We have a lawyer, and when you've got a lawyer you ought to leave your affairs in his hands. But I don't mind telling you that the chest and all its contents belong to us. It was found on my land, and by these three boys. You only came along and carried it away after they'd discovered it."

"Pirate's gold belongs to whoever gets his hands on it," said Doan.

"In that case," said Mr. Blossom, "it certainly belongs to us, for we have our hands on it at present."

"You'd better treat us square, share and share alike, unless you want to go to law," muttered Doan.

"There's nothing doing here now," Mr. Blossom concluded. "We'll meet you at ten o'clock and fix up our differences then."

"It's just a hold-up game," said Stephen, as they went into the house. "Those two scamps wanted to frighten us with their warrants, so we'd divide with them. I vote we don't let them have a penny of it."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mr. Blossom, "if they'd already taken more than several pennies from the chest when they first opened it. I shouldn't wonder if they'd lined their pockets with guineas before we found the bag."

At ten o'clock the boys and Mr. Blossom went to Judge Carter's private office, where Mr. Samuel Sims was already waiting. They had only been there a few minutes when Doan and Parry, accompanied by a lawyer of their own, appeared.

"I promised to have my clients here," said Mr. Sims to the judge, "and here they are. These gentlemen," he waved his hand at Doan and Parry as courteously as if they were among his most valued acquaintances, "have obtained warrants for the arrest of my clients. As I understand it, they claim that my clients have stolen certain property belonging originally to them."

Judge Carter, his eye-glasses resting low on his nose, looked over the upper rims at Mr. Sims. "What was the property in question?" he asked.

"A sum of guineas, found in an old chest supposed to have been hidden by the famous pirate, Edward Teach, commonly known as Blackbeard," answered Mr. Sims, in his most formal legal manner.

Judge Carter sat up straight, his eyes sparkling.

"A sum of guineas! Hidden treasure! Pirate gold!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Sims nodded. "Pirate gold, in fact, your Honor."

"Well," said the judge, "this grows interesting. I have heard stories of pirate gold for years, and I believe that men have searched for it for a couple of centuries. How does it happen that two parties have found it at the same time?"

"I'm going to ask one of my clients, Mr. Thomas Mason, to tell his story from the beginning," said Mr. Sims. "Tom, you start with your buying the box at the shop down-town."

Thereupon Tom related all their adventures that had to do with locating the island drawn on the map, with finding the situation of the treasure-chest, with digging it up, and with their hunting for it after it had been taken from their island. The judge listened with the deepest interest. When Tom finished the judge rubbed his hands saying, "That's the best yarn I've heard in all the time I've been on the bench"

Then the judge looked at Doan and Parry and their lawyer. "Mr. Haines," said he, addressing the lawyer, "what have your clients to say in answer to this?"

Doan stood up and told how he had been hunting for this particular chest for some time, and how he and his friend Parry had had good reason to believe the treasure was hidden on that particular island where the boys had camped. "After the great storm we went out there," said he, "and we found the water had washed away the sand from over the chest, and we took it away with us, as we were rightfully entitled to. Same's you'd pick up a floating lobster-pot, or anything that was wreckage of a vessel."

"To whom does the island belong where the treasure was found?" asked the judge.

"To me," said Mr. Blossom, and he explained how he'd come to buy the islands near Beaufort.

"And do you say positively that you dug the chest out of the bed of that stream?" the judge next asked Tom.

"Positively we did, sir," Tom answered; and each of the other two boys nodded his head.

"And you found it before the storm?" the judge went on.

"The very morning the storm broke," said Mr. Blossom. "I can vouch for that; just as I was going over to take the boys in my motor-boat, I found they had the chest, and persuaded them to let it stay there, feeling sure it would be safe where it was."

Judge Carter looked at Doan and Parry. "These four witnesses are very positive in their statements," said he. "They say they had to dig for a long time before they found the chest. And I understood you to say you found it on the surface after the storm, and didn't have to do any digging for it."

"Yes, that's right," said Doan. "The waves had washed it clear."

Parry added, "There it was standing by itself when we first laid eyes on it."

"Humph!" said the judge. "I know it was a big storm, but it seems to me we'd have to stretch the facts a little to believe it was a big enough storm to wash up a chest that you hadn't been able to find when you'd hunted the island for it before. It seems to me there must have been some digging to uncover that chest; and it's admitted that these boys did dig there before the storm and that you didn't." The judge took off his glasses and tapped them thoughtfully against his fingers. "Of the two stories I've

heard, I'm inclined to believe that these young men found the chest first, and that you two only found it afterwards. And in addition to that, the chest was found on land belonging to Mr. Blossom, and would therefore belong to him, unless it could be proved that some one else had chanced to leave it there. Now it seems that the pirate, Edward Teach, left it there, and in default of any heirs of his appearing to claim the treasure, I must decide that it belongs to the man who owned the island."

"We're willing to go halves with them!" exclaimed Doan. "That's a fair proposition. There's plenty of the money to go 'round."

"We can't agree to that," said Mr. Sims. "We feel that these men simply took what belonged to us."

"And I also think," put in Mr. Blossom, "that they helped themselves to some of the guineas before they hid the bag where we finally found it. Didn't you put some of the guineas into your pockets?" he asked, looking directly at Parry.

The dark man flushed and hesitated. "Well, we did take a few," he admitted.

"There, you see they've had all they're entitled to, and more," said Mr. Blossom; "and they didn't mean to mention that fact to us either."

"Besides," said Rodney, "they have the guineas we left on top of the bag we hid for them to find."

"Yes," said Tom, "they've really got quite a lot of the guineas in those two ways."

Judge Carter smiled. "I'm afraid we'll have to discharge this warrant of arrest," said he. "Of course, if you gentlemen," he added, looking at Parry and Doan, "can bring further proof, I shall be glad to hear it. I should also be glad to have any references from friends of yours in Beaufort. Have you known these gentlemen long, Mr. Haines?" he asked their lawyer.

"They only engaged me this morning," the latter admitted.

"And I might be able to submit references concerning them also," said Mr. Blossom, "from people in Beaufort."

"You understand," went on Judge Carter, "that you have the right to start suit for the recovery of the treasure, if you wish to do so. I should advise you, however, to be content with the guineas you put in your pocket."

Doan got to his feet, followed by his friend. "Well, I feel that we have been buncoed!" said he. "But I don't reckon that was the only treasure the pirates hid 'round Beaufort, and the next we find we're going to keep our hands on!" With that the two left the room.

"Better get your fee from them before they leave town, Haines," said Mr. Sims, with a laugh.

"You're right there," said the lawyer, and he hurried after his two clients.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," said Judge

Carter, when the others had gone. "I think I sized up our two friends pretty accurately. I doubt if they could get the best of references from their fellow-citizens. It's a most remarkable yarn, finding guineas in a chest off the coast. I wish I'd been along with you on that hunt. Well, as we haven't any proof that the gold belonged to the pirate, and as there aren't any heirs here to claim it even in case it did, it is my opinion you're free to do with it as you choose."

Later that morning the boys and Mr. Blossom went to Mr. Samuel Sims' house. The bag was taken from the safe, and the guineas piled on a table.

"The question is now," said Mr. Sims, "what are you going to do with all this treasure?"

"That's for them to say," said Mr. Blossom, looking at the three boys.

"Why, it really belongs to you," said Stephen.

"Oh, no, it doesn't," Mr. Blossom replied. "I told you that whatever you found you were welcome to keep. I'd never have found the guineas, and I don't believe they ever would have been found if you hadn't come to look for them. They're yours to do what you want with."

The boys looked at each other. It was Tom who finally made a suggestion. "Mrs. Pinckney told us that Blackbeard stole a lot of money from her ancestor once. It seems to me it would be mighty nice if we gave these guineas back to Mrs. Pinckney."

There was silence for a minute; then Stephen

said, "It was really Mrs. Pinckney who first got us interested in Blackbeard; and the gold would help her a lot in repairing her house and garden. It seems to me we might each take one of the guineas as a souvenir, and give the rest to Mrs. Pinckney; as if the pirate were returning what he'd taken from her great-great-great-grandfather."

"Could she use these old coins?" Rodney asked, taking up one of the guineas, and looking doubtfully at the unfamiliar design on the coin.

"She certainly could," Mr. Sims answered. "The coins are made of gold, and any bank would be glad to get them at the regular rate of exchange."

"Let's give them to her then," said Rodney. "I vote for it. I think it would be fine for us to give her back what Blackbeard stole."

"Of course you don't positively know that these guineas were ever in Blackbeard's hands," suggested Mr. Sims. "They might have been hidden by some other pirate—Captain Kidd for instance."

"No, it must have been Teach, Uncle Sam," said Stephen. "There's the map with his name on it; we'd never have found the guineas except for the map."

"That's right," put in Henry Blossom. "I think we'll have to take it for granted that it was Captain Edward Teach who hid these particular gold pieces. It seems to me we couldn't do anything better with them than to present them to Mrs. Pinckney."

"I think that's a fine thing to do," assented

Mr. Sims. "There isn't a more charming woman in Charleston than Mrs. William Pinckney, and I know that this money will make a deal of difference to her. She's had hard sailing to make both ends meet lately, and this ought to help a lot."

"Then that's settled," said Tom. He picked up a paper and pencil and began jotting down some figures. "Let's see. We figured out there were two hundred and six guineas in the bag when we found it. There were two in the chest. Mr. Blossom has one of these, and the other we gave to Eliza-Jane. Then we put a dozen guineas in the bag we hid in the sand." He figured on the paper. "After we took those twelve guineas out we had one hundred and ninety-four. We must have that much in the two bags now. Mr. Blossom has a guinea for his watch-chain, and if we give Uncle Sam one, and each of us keep one, that'll take four more, and leave one hundred and ninety. Figuring that each guinea is worth about five dollars, that means we'll have nine hundred and fifty dollars for Mrs. Pinckney."

"Doan and Parry must have got almost one hundred dollars," said Rodney, "when you figure what they probably put in their pockets, and what we left for them in the bag."

"Well, they had to work for it," said Stephen, "and it'll encourage them to hunt harder next time."

Mr. Blossom felt in his pocket and took out the

guinea he had been carrying. "There it is. A fine coin," said he, "and I'll certainly wear it on my watch-chain to remind me of Mr. Blackbeard."

"You pick one out, Uncle Sam," suggested Tom.

Mr. Sims looked over the pile of coins and chose one, and then each of the boys picked out a coin for himself. "And now," said Stephen, "I think we'd better take these guineas back to our house and lock them in father's safe with the others; then we can arrange about taking them to Mrs. Pinckney's house."

"How about going to see her to-morrow afternoon?" said Mr. Sims. "I'd like to go with you."

"All right," agreed Stephen. "We'll make it a party for to-morrow afternoon, and all meet at our house. Of course you'll come with us," he added, looking at Mr. Blossom.

Mr. Blossom was stroking his beard and smiling. "How'd you like for me to play the part of Captain Teach?" said he. "Of course, my beard isn't black; but Mrs. Pinckney doesn't know me, and I could dress at your house to look like a pirate. I've always wanted to play a pirate's rôle. A red handkerchief 'round my head, some bright-colored jacket, belt stuck full of knives and pistols; I think I could give a good imitation of Mr. Blackbeard."

"Fine!" cried Stephen. "We've got a lot of old things in our garret that you could use. I think you'd make a splendid pirate, and it would look fine to see Blackbeard come walking into Mrs. Pinckney's

house. You could ride in our carriage, and nobody would see you in your costume."

"You'll need some kind of a chest to carry the guineas in," said Tom. "The little one I bought that had the map in would be too small, but I think we could find one the right size at the old curiosity shop."

So the four arranged with Mr. Sims that he should meet them next day, and left. Rodney carried the bag of gold to Stephen's, and Mrs. Sims put it in the safe with the rest of the guineas. Then the boys and Henry Blossom hunted the old curiosity shop.

Again Stephen looked at postage stamps, and Rodney and Mr. Blossom inspected old fire-arms, while Tom busied himself with boxes and chests in a corner. At last he found what he wanted, a small leather chest with handles on each end and one on the top. He bargained with the store-keeper for it, while the others watched, pretending to think the chest of little value. Finally, he bought it for a dollar, and bore it away proudly, holding it by the leather handle on the cover.

That afternoon they opened Tom's new purchase, but found no map inside. Then they poured the two bags of guineas into it. It held them all with a little room to spare. As it stood strapped and tied with a cord the boys gazed proudly at it. "Looks like a pirate's chest all right," said Rodney. "It looks more like it than the little box Tom bought first."

"You ought to put the original map in the chest,"

said Stephen. "That would convince Mrs. Pinckney we found the money where we said we did."

"No," said Tom, "I'm going to keep that map, and have it framed. I wouldn't give it up for a million guineas!"

They heard a voice down on the porch singing:

"Oh, my name was Captain Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed;
And most shockingly I did,
As I sailed."

"That's Mr. Blossom!" exclaimed Rodney. "He's come back from doing his errands." They ran down-stairs to join him, and there on the porch the four broke into a war-dance, chanting the familiar lines of the pirate's song, as they circled 'round and 'round.

"I'm afraid we'd shock the neighbors if they saw us," laughed Mr. Blossom.

"What do we care?" said Stephen. "Pirates never did care what people thought of them."

"I want to go down to look at 'The Wild Goose,'" said Mr. Blossom presently. "Who'd like to go along?" They all wanted to, and soon they were on the water-front. They found the motor-boat where she'd been left the night before, and her owner engaged a man to look after her for a few days.

There was a celebration at Stephen's house that night. Mr. Sims had received a letter from Colonel Whitney, saying that he and his wife were coming to Charleston next morning to make a short visit.

"Why not invite them to meet us at Mrs. Pinckney's?" suggested Tom. They all agreed that it was a good idea.

Then they planned what Mr. Blossom should do when he played the part of Blackbeard, and had a short rehearsal of the scene.

"I don't know what Elizabeth Pinckney will think of this," said Mrs. Sims, laughing as she listened to the make-believe pirate's words. "You mustn't be too blood-thirsty."

"I'll be the pleasantest little pirate that ever came to town," said Mr. Blossom. "Captain Kidd and Captain Edward Teach may have been terrible fellows, but I promise you this Captain Blackbeard will make amends for them."

"Somehow I don't feel that Blackbeard could have been such an awful bad lot," said Tom. "I feel as if he'd been an old friend of ours."

"So do I," said Stephen.

"I like him, too," said Rodney. "Good old searover he was!"

"Well, he certainly gave you boys a good time," said Stephen's father, "though I don't suppose he thought of any such thing when he hid the guineas."

"Certainly not," said Tom. "But that's the way with hidden treasure. One adventurer hides it, and then other adventurers come along and have the fun of discovering it again."

XXII

BLACKBEARD'S GIFT

MRS. PINCKNEY, sewing in the sitting-room of her small house, was pleased to have Mrs. George Sims come for an afternoon call. Mrs. Sims brought two friends with her, Colonel and Mrs. Whitney from Beaufort. Mrs. Pinckney had met the Whitneys before and knew all about them, just as they, on their part, knew all about Mrs. Pinckney, as well-brought-up people in South Carolina always know about each other. The hostess offered her guests afternoon tea, and they were having it when the bell rang a second time, and Mr. George Sims with his brother Samuel Sims, the lawyer arrived.

"Well, this is quite a party," said Mrs. Sims. "I'm afraid so many of us will quite crowd you out of your house," she added, looking at the white-haired, gentle-faced lady.

"Oh, no, my dear, I couldn't have too many friends come to see me. I always feel as if it were an imposition to expect them to come out so far to the outskirts of town to see me, unless they're like your Stephen and his two cousins, who are fond of tramping in the country. They told you they stopped here one afternoon, didn't they? And then they

called again the next day. They wanted to learn something about the pirate Blackbeard ; but I couldn't tell them much." Mrs. Pinckney smiled as she rose and went to her writing-desk. "I found an old picture, labelled 'Captain Edward Teach, the renowned Pirate Blackbeard,' and I thought I'd like to show it to Stephen and his cousins the next time they called." She picked up the engraving from among some papers on her desk and handed it to Mrs. Sims. The picture showed a very fierce-looking man, with two long braided strands of black beard. Mrs. Sims smiled at the picture, and then handed it to the others.

"I don't wonder your ancestor gave anything he had to such a ferocious chap as that," observed Mr. Samuel Sims. "I'm sure I should have. I believe that story about the pirate is one of the traditions of your family, isn't it, Mrs. Pinckney?"

"Oh, it's more than a tradition," said the little woman. "There doesn't seem to be any doubt that it was an actual fact. My great-great-great-grandfather, Samuel Pinckney, had business interests in England, and he sailed from Charleston on a ship called 'The Golden Horn,' in 1718. There were other passengers, of course, but Samuel Pinckney seems to have had the largest sum of money of any of those on board. Five hundred guineas they say he had in his strong box. I believe he had a pistol and a couple of black boys to carry the box for him, but in spite of all that the pirate chased 'The Golden

Horn' and got it, and took the box away from my ancestor. It makes an amusing family story, doesn't it? You see, whenever any of us Pinckneys have needed money, we've always said: 'Oh, if we only had the gold pieces the pirate took from our ancestor!' It seems an easy way of putting the responsibility on another's shoulders. Now when I see how my house needs this done here, and that done there, I lay all the blame on Captain Teach."

"Your house doesn't look as if it needed anything done to it," protested Colonel Whitney, gallantly.

Mrs. Pinckney smiled. "Oh, yes, it does, Colonel," said she. "It needs a great deal done to it. I'll not give up the satisfaction of blaming that old buccaneer, just because my guests don't know as much about the inside of my house as I do; and plumbers' and carpenters' bills are so terribly high nowadays."

Mr. George Sims glanced at the great-grandfather's clock that stood in the corner of the room, and then turned to Mrs. Pinckney. "I wish you'd show Colonel Whitney the painting of your great-grandmother," said he. "The Colonel's a fine judge of paintings, and I've told him you had such a charming one of her."

"Why certainly," assented the hostess. "Here it is," and she stepped to the rear of the room where the oil painting hung above the mantelpiece. "I think we value it more as a family treasure than as a

work of art," she explained, as she looked up at the charming pink-faced lady, not altogether unlike herself, except that the painted lady wore a yellow satin gown and held a large pink rose in one delicate hand.

"Very interesting," said Colonel Whitney, putting on his glasses and looking closely at the portrait. "A sureness of touch, and yet a boldness in the drawing. "It reminds me of"— A loud knock came at the front door—such a very loud knock that every one in the room turned abruptly about. Mr. Samuel Sims was nearest to the door, and he stepped into the hall and opened the front door, which was so placed that all those in the sitting-room could see it.

Imagine the amazement of Mrs. Pinckney and Colonel Whitney, who were standing at the farther end of the sitting-room, and of Mrs. Whitney and Mrs. Sims, who were still at the tea-table, when a large bearded man, without so much as a "by your leave," marched into the sitting-room. Around his forehead was a large red handkerchief, and his shirt was opened at the throat. His jacket was of a dull bronzed green, looking as if it had weathered many a storm; his knee breeches were of the same color; and he wore stockings and low shoes with tarnished silver buckles. Strangest of all, there were stuck into his red sash two heavy-handled pistols and a couple of sheathed knives.

The people in the room stared at this strange figure in amazement; then they saw come in back of

him Stephen Sims and Tom Mason, each holding one handle of a small chest, while Rodney was back of it, ready to keep the chest from tipping.

"Put it there!" exclaimed the big man, pointing in front of Mrs. Pinckney, who had now sat down in a big chair. The boys set down the chest where he directed, and then stood to one side.

The man bowed to the ladies. On the fingers of his right hand were a number of curious rings.

"Have I the honor of addressing Mrs. William Pinckney?" he inquired in a very deep voice that seemed to suit his strange appearance.

The little lady rose and came forward, saying, "Yes, I am Mrs. William Pinckney."

"Good," said the stranger, and he made another bow to her. "I have sailed in the service of Captain Edward Teach, whom some folks have called Blackbeard, and I'm doing his bidding in coming here. One of your forefathers, Mr. Samuel Pinckney, fell in with Captain Teach on the high-seas one day, and the Captain, being in pressing need of funds at the time, was obliged to borrow a certain sum from the excellent Samuel Pinckney. Five hundred guineas was the sum, I understand."

Colonel Whitney drew up the chair for Mrs. Pinckney, and she sat down again, more and more surprised at the strange words of her visitor.

The big man drew a piece of paper that looked like an old parchment from the pocket of his coat.

He unfolded it and read: "I desire that you take a chest I have hidden on my island and deliver it to the heirs of the excellent Samuel Pinckney. Part of the money I had from him has been spent, but such as is in the chest I bid you deliver to them. Edward Teach."

The stranger pointed his finger at the parchment. "Those are my orders," said he. Then he pointed at the chest on the floor in front of him. "And there is the chest in question, Mrs. Pinckney."

The people in the room moved in their chairs. Mrs. Sims murmured, "Well, I declare!" Colonel Whitney leaned forward to have a better look at the box.

"Do you mean you're bringing that to me, sir?" Mrs. Pinckney asked.

"Captain Teach is sending it to you, madame," said the stranger, "providing you are the heir of Samuel Pinckney."

"Indeed she is," said Mr. Samuel Sims. "I can vouch for that."

"It is yours," continued the stranger. "Yes, to do as you like with. I suggest that you open it."

Mrs. Pinckney leaned over to the chest. She touched the lock in front, and found that the box was unfastened, then she took the handle of the cover and lifted it. Within the chest was a pile of gold pieces. For a few minutes she stared at the glitter of so much gold, then she picked up one of the coins and read the inscription on it.

"The head of King George!" she murmured. "Well, I must say this is the most extraordinary thing that ever happened!"

"It is!" declared Colonel Whitney, positively; and he picked up one of the coins and examined it. Then Mrs. Pinckney sat down in a chair close to the chest and smiled at the big, bearded stranger.

"Is this some delightful joke you are playing, sir?" she asked.

"No joke, madame," he answered. "Here are some two hundred guineas, part of those Captain Teach took from Samuel Pinckney. They have been found, and are now returned to you. They are all yours. You can see they are real guineas. I assure you, on my word of honor, that they belong to you." His eyes and voice carried conviction.

Mrs. Pinckney looked at Mrs. Sims. "What do you think of that?" she said. "What ought I to do about it?"

"Take them," answered Mrs. Sims. "It's only a just return for what your family ought to have had these many years."

The little white-haired lady smiled graciously at the bearded man. "I don't know your name, sir," she said, "but I thank you with all my heart for your generous gift. I don't know where you came from, or where you found these coins, but I thank you for bringing them to me, if, as you say, they did once belong to my great-great-grandfather."

"It seems they did," answered the man.

Mrs. Pinckney turned to Mr. Samuel Sims. "Will you be my lawyer, Mr. Sims," said she, "and tell me what I ought to do about this?"

"The guineas are yours," he answered. "I'm as certain of it as this pirate man is."

"And I saw the guineas found on Captain Teach's island," said the stranger. "There's no missing link in the chain. They are yours; every one of them."

"Goodness gracious me!" said Mrs. Pinckney, and she sat back in her chair, and waved one hand before her face as if it were a fan. "I feel like Cinderella when she suddenly woke up to find she had more riches than she knew what to do with! Whatever shall I do with so much money?" Then everyone laughed, and began to suggest things that she might do with the money. In the midst of their suggestions, Mrs. Pinckney clapped her hands.

"Why, I declare, I've forgotten my manners, and haven't offered this very kind gentleman any tea. I don't know whether pirates care for tea, but there's a bottle of Jamaica rum in the pantry, and perhaps he'll mix a little of that with the tea." She picked up a small bell from the table and rang it. When her maid came in she said, "Maria get some fresh tea, and more cups and that bottle of Jamaica rum, and that plum-cake from the pantry cupboard."

The maid hurried away.

"And now, kind gentleman," Mrs. Pinckney

went on, "May I ask your name? I take it for granted that you are what you say you are, but you must have a name, too."

"Henry Blossom, at your service, madame." The gentlemanly pirate gave a bow. "And, as a matter of fact, I'm acquainted with these ladies and gentlemen, so we don't need any introduction."

"Where did he come from, Stephen?" asked Mrs. Pinckney. "I know that pirates are a shy people, and won't say much about themselves, but perhaps you could tell me something about him."

"We found him in the Sea Islands," Stephen answered. "On the very next island in fact to the one where we found the guineas."

"Then I think you should all share in the treasure," said Mrs. Pinckney.

"No, it really belonged to your great-great-great-grandfather, and so now it belongs to you," said Stephen. "We worked it out carefully, and we've each taken a coin as a souvenir. You see it all began by your telling us about Blackbeard that afternoon we stopped here, and then Tom finding the map in the box he bought. Then we went to the Sea Islands, and there we found the treasure at the place marked with the red cross on the map; so what we really did was to follow Blackbeard's instructions and bring you back what he took from Mr. Samuel Pinckney."

"Then you three boys and Mr. Blossom have been sort of fairy god-mothers to me," Mrs. Pinck-

ney suggested, smiling. Somehow the idea of the boys and the piratical-looking man being fairy god-mothers struck everyone as funny.

"Its the first time I was ever called a fairy god-mother," said Mr. Blossom. "However, if you think I really am one, I'll give over being a pirate for the time, and put on the manners of a fairy god-mother, and sit down in a chair and drink tea." He pulled the pistols and knives from his belt, and laid them on a side-table; then he sat down, and his three able assistants also found themselves chairs.

Tea was brought in and the plum-cake, and the three boys told their adventures at length.

"And some time," said Colonel Whitney, when the three had finished their exciting story, "you must all come down to Beaufort, and we'll go out to the Sea Islands, and see just exactly where it was that Tom located the chest."

"And you must all see our ship, 'The Jolly Roger,' where she's stuck in the sand," put in Rodney. "She's as fine a ship as ever sailed the seas."

"And then you must all come to my island," said Henry Blossom, "and I'll take you all for a cruise in 'The Wild Goose.'"

"And we'll stop at Calkins' Cove, and see the original chest, and tell Eliza-Jane and Peter what happened after we left them." This was Stephen's suggestion.

"And you all ought to see the Jordan farm, and eat some of Mrs. Jordan's buckwheat cakes," said Tom.

"That's a pretty big program," laughed Mrs. Sims.

"And then you must all come here, and see what I've done to my house; how I've mended my porch, repaired my fences, and fixed my garden," said Mrs. Pinckney. She glanced at the chest on the floor. "There must be a great many guineas there," said she. "I'll have to take them to bank one by one, or they'll suspect me of having done something wrong to get so many of them."

"All you'll have to do," suggested Colonel Whitney, "is to tell the bank-clerk that you've found some money belonging to your great-great-great-grandfather. I wouldn't mention Blackbeard or you'll have the people in Charleston giving up their jobs and hunting buried treasure along the coast."

"It's strange how people love to hunt for such things," said Mr. Samuel Sims.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Stephen. "You know you'd like to have been along, Uncle Sam."

The lawyer nodded. "Yes, I reckon I would, Steve. We're all born adventurers when it comes to that." He glanced at Mr. Blossom, who was just finishing a large slice of plum-cake.

"Oh you needn't look suspiciously at me," said the big man. "I'll admit that I've had the time of

my life." He folded his arms and tried to look very fierce. "Next to being a pirate, the best fun is hunting pirate gold."

"It sure is!" said Tom.

"Look out!" cried Rodney. "Steve's going to sing."

"Well, why shouldn't I?" demanded his cousin. "Come ahead, Mr. Blossom."

The make-believe pirate and the three boys stood up, and standing back of the box of guineas sang Captain Kidd's song, and they sang loud enough to frighten any passers-by on the street.

"And now," said Mrs. Sims, when the echo of the rollicking song had died away, "I think we'd better all go back to our house for supper, in case you adventurers can think of anything so common-place."

"But first let me thank all four of you again," said Mrs. Pinckney. "I think I ought to share the guineas with you all."

"No, no," said Tom. "You see we got more out of the adventure than anyone else. We had a wonderful time!"

Stephen and Rodney both nodded. "We surely did!" they exclaimed as one.

Mr. Blossom stood up and bowed to the lady. "In the words of my fellow conspirators, 'we surely did,' " said he, "and I want to thank you and your ancestor, Mr. Samuel Pinckney, for having lost the treasure so that we could find it."

